

Vol 5 - Chapter 1: The Heart Leads the Way.

Seringe Island (Seringe I)

[Area 840 km². Population around 150,000. The island is located on the Indian Ocean coast, about 45 km off the coast of Tanganyika. It is a flat island with coral reefs and limestone, situated in a tropical monsoon climate. From April to May and November to December is the rainy season, from June to October is the hot dry season with southwest winds, and from December to March is the cool dry season with northeast monsoon winds. The average annual rainfall is about 1,500 mm. Early in the season, the relatively high temperatures are quite pleasant due to the southwest winds.]

The main crops are coconut trees, clove trees (a type of spice), and rice grown in flooded areas. Additionally, various food crops and fruits are also very common. Along with fishing, the island's residents are self-sufficient in food.]

Jeong Taeui attentively read the information, as if he wanted to memorize every detail, then closed his laptop.

He didn't know any information about that island, an island in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa. How many square kilometers it covered, its population, climate, and main industries. Therefore, it would be more helpful if there was something like a map of the island, but he couldn't find anything like that on any website.

It was considered a small island—only half the size of Jeju Island. But even if it was small, finding one person there wouldn't be easy. However, fortunately, Kyle's brief explanations were more useful than any encyclopedia with basic lines of information. The residential areas were divided into three or four parts. Among them, especially noteworthy were the mansions of foreigners—mainly Middle Eastern tycoons—located in several areas along the southeast coast.

Jeong Jaeui might be there. No, there's a high possibility that he is actually there.

Jeong Taeui hobbled over to the bed and threw himself down. The sun was at its peak, although the sunlight couldn't penetrate the room due to the eaves covering, it still persistently sneaked through the window, which was so wide that it could even be used as a door. The light spilled through, dazzling.

Taeui casually rested an arm on the window ledge, which was only a hand's breadth higher than the bed, and looked outside. The cool blue pool was just a few steps away. Jeong Taeui lay face down, gazing at the pool and wriggling his heavily plastered leg.

The empty bench beside the pool had an open book on it, indicating that someone had been there not long ago. On the small wooden table next to it was an empty beer can. Taeui just noticed the presence of that beer can now.

"..."

Jeong Taeui licked his lips and glared at the can. It was Schultheiss beer. Damn it. He wanted to drink beer too. Yet he drank alone.

Jeong Taeui sulkily mumbled to himself, thinking about the man who had been sitting there a moment before.

After a late lunch, while Jeong Taeui was rolling around in his room, that man had brought an old book from the library and sat by the pool to read. A while later, when the weather got hotter, he jumped into the pool for a while and then climbed back onto the bench to read leisurely after swimming. Truly a leisurely and relaxing vacation.

He thought to himself how lucky it was. Surprisingly, Ilay didn't interfere with what Jeong Taeui was doing. Whether he napped in his room, snacked in the dining room, or read in the library, Ilay didn't interfere and just enjoyed his own leisure time by swimming in the pool or reading books.

Well, it's not too surprising. Even when he was at UNHRDO, aside from his daily tasks, he didn't care what Jeong Taeui did. Even with others, Ilay RieGrow was very indifferent.

It's scary, although he always seems unconcerned with others, he seems able to see through anyone.

But anyway.

Sometimes, this man would suddenly become so animalistic that it sent chills down one's spine. Maybe that also fits the aspect of "seeing through everyone" in him.

For example, at this moment.

Just now, when Jeong Taeui was sitting by the window using his laptop and planning to go to Rita for something to eat, he glanced out the window. Ilay seemed to have just finished swimming; he was toweling himself dry and sat down on a long chair, leisurely opening his book.

Jeong Taeui got lost in his thoughts for a moment while watching the man. He didn't seem to notice what Jeong Taeui was doing. Should he pretend to go to the supermarket to buy ice cream? If he took the opportunity to escape, would he succeed? If faced with a normal opponent, he might risk it. In a one-on-one situation, although he might get injured, he was confident he could escape safely.

But he's not a normal opponent...

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue and sighed as Ilay turned the page.

Right after that.

"Success largely depends on judgment. That's a premise applicable in most situations... There's a saying '*What seems trivial actually contains the core wisdom, doesn't it?*' "

Ilay quietly tapped his fingers on the page, reading the lines from Eagle Wall in a low voice. Although he didn't show it, Jeong Taeui's heart shook for a moment. He rubbed his chest, pretending nothing happened, then said, "What does that mean?" and tilted his head. Ilay indifferently looked away from the book to Taeui.

"I don't think this is wrong."

But what is it? Jeong Taeui shrugged. Ilay looked back at the page and spoke with a tone that lacked meaning.

"For example, before embarking on an adventurous journey, choose the time when your physical condition is at its best... Just that alone can be considered a correct judgment. Regardless of whether the adventure will be truly feasible later on."

Jeong Taeui lightly tapped his plastered leg on the floor. From the lower back down, his body felt lethargic like a sponge soaked in water since early morning, and for a moment, he couldn't move, feeling like a stranded fish.

Damn it. What is he?

Jeong Taeui cursed inwardly and headed to the dining room. Although he had thought about going for ice cream with no ulterior motives, that thought vanished.

After receiving an egg tart from Rita, Jeong Taeui calmed down and returned to his room. He angrily looked at Ilay reading by the pool right outside his window and opened his laptop. At that moment, Rita came and called Ilay, saying he had received a call from Hong Kong and should go to the office.

Hearing that, Ilay showed a moment of displeasure, as if being called by the company during a vacation. But he still got up and left.

Look at that, he seems to hate being interrupted by work during a relaxing time... Jeong Taeui mumbled to himself, looking at his laptop, his brows furrowed as Ilay disappeared from sight.

But thinking about it, it's not like he was called during a vacation; he had clearly left UNHRDO without permission. There's no reason to be displeased just because he got a call.

"If it's a call from Hong Kong, are they calling him back quickly? If that's the case... When will he leave here..."

Jeong Taeui half-rolled on the bed, talking to the air, looking up at the bright blue sky, his eyes squinting from the glaring sunlight.

In reality, what he was curious about wasn't when Ilay would return to Hong Kong, but how Ilay would decide to deal with him. Unless he leaves UNHRDO, he still has to return to Hong Kong; what will he do with him then?

Would he let him go gently, or drag him to Hong Kong and then deal with him without a trace, or maybe break his limbs and lock him up somewhere?

Jeong Taeui spread his fingers, counting the possible scenarios in his head with fear. The last one was particularly unpleasant. It would be better if it was the third scenario. The first one seemed unlikely, even if he escaped death and was reborn. Considering the situation, the second scenario seemed the most likely.

"But that's still not good."

Jeong Taeui mumbled with a sigh. Just yesterday, he seemed to want to give up when he said, "If I stay with him, it doesn't matter if it's Hong Kong or anywhere else in the world, it's all the same."

Seringe.

Where his brother was.

The brother he had tried so hard to find all this time but couldn't find any trace of had been kidnapped. And that's where he might be, the brother he hadn't seen in a long time.

Jeong Taeui slightly opened his eyes under the dazzling sunlight. He raised his hand to shade his forehead, blocking the light, and whispered to himself.

"Kidnapped and imprisoned..."

That was truly unfamiliar.

Jeong Jaeui with "Kidnapping and Imprisonment." It seems like there's a lot of connection when placing these words together. But in reality, it doesn't fit at all.

Many people and organizations have coveted Jeong Jaeui since he was young. They tried everything to kidnap him. But not once did they succeed, no matter how hard they tried. If Jeong Jaeui was really kidnapped and imprisoned...

"Unless the perpetrator is someone luckier than him...."

"I don't think such a person exists, but even if there were someone that was lucky, they wouldn't have to kidnap Jeong Jaeui in the first place."

Suddenly, a deep voice sounded right next to him.

Damn it. No one jokes like that.

Jeong Taeui quickly closed his eyes (pretending to sleep), perhaps due to his mood, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his leg.

He remembered that he had closed the door when he came in. If he remembered correctly, the door with its rusty hinges would make a faint creaking sound when opened or closed.

"Leisurely, aren't you? It seems you sleep very well despite the sunlight shining in."

"....Yeah... I didn't sleep well last night."

Jeong Taeui mumbled, trying to appear as weary as possible in front of him. He didn't have to act too much because he was genuinely tired. Taeui closed his eyes, wanting to play the role of a mute. But he knew that the right to remain silent had no effect on the man in front of him, no matter how he acted.

"Is it because the bed isn't comfortable? My brother specifically paid attention to the guest room. Let's see, even the bed you're lying on was custom ordered and took several months to arrive."

Ilay had been standing silently like a cat entering the room. Creak, the wooden floor made a slight noise. For a moment, he felt furious and clenched his fist.

The bed isn't comfortable? You say that? This bastard.

But Ilay—that damn Ilay Riegrow, the one so gentle it could be described as a special trait, intentionally asked despite knowing the real reason why he didn't sleep well. Jeong Taeui gripped the blanket tightly, and Ilay watched his knuckles turn white before speaking.

"Why are you gripping so tightly... with that strength, you could catch a bear."

Jeong Taeui squinted at him through the sarcastic laughter in his voice. He could see Ilay's long, white fingers slowly caressing the back of his hand, then fondling the joints.

Ilay's nails gleamed like glass under the light. One thing was for sure, Jeong Taeui's extremely ordinary hands were more suited for punching or holding weapons than those pretty white hands.

However, Jeong Taeui quietly withdrew his hand from Ilay's pale fingers and said.

"I swear, if I had to fight a bear, it would be your hand, not mine."

Ilay laughed. He sat down on the edge of the bed beside him, and as he sat on the blanket draped over Jeong Taeui, it pulled down slightly but didn't shift much.

Like a cat, Jeong Taeui thought. But no cat or animal can defeat a bear...

Jeong Taeui buried his face in the blanket and shook his head. He wasn't feeling well today. His head had been spinning since morning, making it hard to focus. He'd heard that even when someone is unwell, they can still concentrate, but Jeong Taeui felt outdated now, unable to think clearly.

Jeong Taeui sighed and suddenly turned his head. Since Ilay sat on the bed, he hadn't sensed his presence at all. When a beast becomes suspiciously quiet, other animals around it must feel a chill.

The moment his gaze met Ilay's, something was suddenly thrust in front of him. Jeong Taeui felt like he was almost hit in the nose and caught it just in time.

It was a can of beer.

"I just got it from the fridge, it's still very cold."

"... Thanks."

He would have been more grateful if Ilay had handed it to him normally. Jeong Taeui carefully opened the can. If he hadn't caught or dodged it, his nose might have been crushed, and he would have had to say goodbye to his sense of smell.

After downing the beer, he still felt a bit thirsty.

Jeong Taeui sadly shook the empty can, thinking he might get another one, when he caught Ilay's gaze.

He was watching Taeui. His eyes were sharp as knives but utterly indifferent.

Knock, Knock - His fingers tapped rhythmically on the chair as if he were thinking about something.

"..."

Jeong Taeui frowned and pursed his lips.

Wait a minute.... He didn't seem irritated, but what did that look mean?

Jeong Taeui reached for the porcelain kettle on the table beside the bed. He tilted it back and drank straight from it. Rita would have a fit if she saw this, but he had no choice since the cup was on the bookshelf right behind Ilay.

He was thirsty, but not to the point of needing to drink water immediately. But because Ilay just stared at him without saying anything, the atmosphere grew more awkward.

At this point, if there was anything that put him in such deep thought, it was likely the call from Hong Kong a while ago.

Think about it, he had left without being on leave and without permission. He even used a private jet without following any necessary procedures. Although Jeong Taeui didn't know much about UNHRDO's complicated regulations, he could guess that Ilay was in big trouble this time. But it was still better than the incidents he'd caused there; at least this time, it didn't involve anyone's life. Even if he had to write a report, be jailed, or even demoted or fired, Ilay wouldn't bat an eye.

"..."

That jail... being locked up for a few months wouldn't be a big deal.

Jeong Taeui put down the kettle and quietly looked at Ilay and asked.

"I heard you received a call from Hong Kong. Was it from UNHRDO? I guess it's about you coming here... Oh. Or is it about the arms deal?"

Only after speaking did Taeui remember that the second possibility was entirely plausible. But he figured Ilay wouldn't say anything more about leaving without permission.

Ilay raised an eyebrow and nodded with a nonchalant "ah" and shrugged.

"Nothing special, they just asked me to return soon. Tomorrow. The request was even signed by the Commander-in-Chief."

"Tomorrow? If it's tomorrow...."

"Considering the time difference, we should leave today."

Ilay finished Taeui's sentence. Jeong Taeui looked at him blankly for a moment.

"Today..."

He glanced at the clock on the wall. It was the time when the remaining hours of the day could start being counted down. Today didn't have much time left. Depending on one's perspective, one could say there was still plenty of time, but if they had to leave the country immediately, it was too rushed.

Jeong Taeui fell into deep thought and silently looked at Ilay. For a moment, he thought of the first possibility he had just considered (that Ilay would let him go peacefully), but quickly dismissed it. He knew well that life wasn't that easy.

"If we have to leave today..."

Jeong Taeui slowly let go of his luck and waited for Ilay to say something more. But he didn't speak for a long time as if he had a lot to think about. He only tapped his fingers lightly on the worn-out chair, then suddenly stopped.

"Are you going to find Jeong Jaeui...?"

He spoke unexpectedly. But at the same time, Taeui quickly realized that these were the most critical words from earlier. Once again, it was surprising. Although the usual way for people like him was to first probe the other's intentions, he didn't expect him to do the same with him. He thought Ilay would ignore his wishes and just do as he pleased.

"... Yes. Do you want to help me?"

Jeong Taeui asked with a smile.

This man had to return to Hong Kong. Jeong Taeui had to go to Africa. Would he let him go right after capturing him? Just thinking about it seemed laughable. There's no way that would happen.

Ilay's gaze at Jeong Taeui became unreadable. His eyes, like thin glass blades, despite having seen them many times, still made him feel a chill each time.

Jeong Taeui grumbled softly with an unamused smile.

"Don't look at me like that. I won't ask for your help, just don't get in my way."

The last part was what Jeong Taeui wanted most, and it was also the future he hoped for.

He wondered if Ilay's lips had slightly curved up. He uttered a few short words with lips that seemed to be smiling.

"In short, Jeong Taeui. You'll come to Hong Kong with me by plane tonight."

"..."

Jeong Taeui frowned and glared at Ilay with dissatisfaction.

Right. Just like this. This was more his style.

So why ask him at all? Jeong Taeui sighed bitterly.

Vol 5 - Chapter 2: Worry about you

It's time to seriously think about it. What should Jeong Taeui do now?

In reality, if Ilay Riegrow insisted on taking him to Hong Kong even if Taeui didn't agree, there was no way he could escape his clutches. Especially with Ilay still having all his limbs and his eyes always glued to Taeui, there was no way Taeui could outsmart him. He couldn't fight him one-on-one either.

Jeong Taeui couldn't use his old trick of drugging Ilay, tying him up, and running away anymore... Unless he had a new identity, he'd be caught by Ilay before even getting through customs.

Creating a new identity was the best way. Jeong Taeui didn't know if this was possible while Ilay was still watching him, but Ilay wasn't someone who would be fooled twice by the same trick. Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue and scratched his head before looking up at Ilay.

"Do I have the right to refuse?"

"No."

A calm response came immediately, just as he expected.

"So what if we transit somewhere else for a while?"

"From Berlin to Dar es Salaam, then switch to a light aircraft to Seringe, find Jeong Jaeui, then back to Dar es Salaam and on to Berlin—no, flying straight to Johannesburg would be faster, then to Hong Kong. If we do that, we could be there by tomorrow."

"..."

How many times had he thought about tearing that casually talking mouth open all at once? Jeong Taeui silently counted and gave up because even both hands wouldn't be enough.

There were many things he wanted to say, but he decided to keep his mouth shut because he knew no matter what he said, he couldn't outtalk him. Suddenly, Ilay spoke amidst his silence.

"Taeil. Maybe you've thought about this at least once."

"...?"

"Jeong Jaeil is very lucky. They say he was kidnapped and imprisoned, but no one really believes that. If he really wanted to, he could have returned unharmed. Moreover, he hasn't contacted anyone, including you."

"..."

"Maybe Jeong Jaeil never really wanted to meet you in the first place ——— Haven't you ever thought about that?"

Jeong Taeui calmly looked at Ilay. It wasn't a mocking or teasing tone. He was just stating exactly what he was thinking. Taeui nodded.

"Yeah... that's possible. So, in that case, even if I go to Seringe, I won't be able to see him."

Jeong Taeui shrugged and mumbled.

Forget Seringe, even if Jeong Jaeil were standing right outside that door, if he didn't want to see Jeong Taeui, he would never be able to see him.

"But I don't think that's likely. Just because he doesn't want to see me doesn't mean he never wants to see me again."

In reality, he couldn't stop thinking about it. Even on his birthday, his brother didn't contact him, which had never happened before. So, of course, he couldn't help but think about that possibility. Maybe his brother was just too engrossed in something to think about him.

"He hates me, this... Yeah, I guess that's possible. I didn't even think about it."

Jeong Taeui mumbled bitterly and nodded. He had never thought about it despite all the premises. But even if he thought about it, it didn't seem likely.

Ilay raised an eyebrow, observing Taeui nodding in front of him.

"Your relationship with your brother is very good."

"Hmmm—? Instead of saying it's good... there's nothing bad between us."

Their personalities weren't ones that would easily clash, but they also weren't ones that could be described as having a good relationship. Jeong Taeui briefly thought about his brother.

They weren't like any typical siblings. His brother never took him to an internet café or played baseball or basketball with him. However, there was nothing for them to argue about regarding their preferences.

It seemed like a very dry relationship.

But even so, he still hoped———.

"I want to see my brother."

So I don't want to go to Hong Kong with you.

Ilay couldn't possibly miss the thoughts running through Taeui's little head.

He was someone who could see even what Jeong Taeui didn't want to be seen. Ilay's eyes narrowed more. Jeong Taeui looked straight into those eyes, unsure of what he was thinking.

"Jeong Taeui."

"You think you have a choice?"

"...don't I?"

Jeong Taeui sighed and mumbled. Clearly, just three seconds ago, he was confident about doing things his way, but he was quickly brought back to reality.

While Jeong Taeui was silently clenching his lips, Ilay stayed quiet for a while and then asked again.

"If not, were you planning to take the opportunity to tie me up again and escape?"

"What..."

Jeong Taeui was speechless, even though he wanted to say it was possible, the words got stuck in his throat, unable to come out.

He used to think he was quite good at speaking ambiguously, but now he might have to reconsider that thought. This was why dealing with someone with quick thinking was difficult, not knowing what they would do next. Lying in front of such people usually didn't work. But even so, um, he wouldn't go around following him everywhere.

However, Jeong Taeui sighed and shrugged. After struggling for a while, he knew what he had to do.

In most cases, or rather, in all cases, time was the best medicine to heal all wounds.

The extent would depend on the amount of time you had and whether you had the ability to wait for that day to come, but in the end, almost no problem couldn't be solved with time.

Sooner or later, whether it be months, years, or even longer, Jeong Taeui could escape from Ilay.

Because his anger and obsession with him would fade with time. Then, at some point, Jeong Taeui would have another opportunity. He never thought that he would never have a chance to escape from him for the rest of his life.

... Although, in his case, considering Ilay's personality, he might kill and get rid of Taeui without worrying about anything before his resentment faded and that opportunity came to him.

Jeong Taeui scratched his cheek and clicked his tongue, showing he wasn't giving up and weakly resisted one last time.

"But if we find Jaeui, wouldn't it benefit your company too? You've been looking for him all this time, haven't you?"

"The company? Well, the company won't suffer much damage anyway, and besides, that's not my business."

"The company is managed by my brother, not me," Ilay added, waving his hand gently. Jeong Taeui tried to hold on once more.

"So what about UNHDRO? That's where you work (though I don't think you have anything like a member there), but don't you intend to help them find the person they're desperately searching for?"

"Me?"

Ilay's answer was just one word. And that one word represented all his answers. Jeong Taeui suddenly felt ridiculed by Ilay even though he knew he would be like this. He knew well that no matter how much he talked, Ilay wouldn't warmly say, "I understand, then you go find him." Thinking about it, the most confusing person here was himself for saying things he knew would not be answered.

"Tae. If so, let's go back to the first issue."

"...?"

Jeong Taeui suspiciously looked at Ilay at his sudden words.

"Jeong Jaeil, as you said, is certainly an important figure for both T&R and UNHDRO, as well as other related organizations. In other words, as long as there is a clue about his whereabouts, those trying to find him won't be lacking. That means he will be saved. So why are you so determined to go there?"

"Saved? It's not that I want to save him, I just want to see him."

Besides, Jeong Taeui shook his head, saying: "He's not someone who needs saving."

Perhaps, the reason his uncle asked Jeong Taeui to find Jeong Jaeui wasn't to deepen their brotherly bond, but even if that were the case, Jeong Taeui still wanted to see Jeong Jaeui. He didn't know why he couldn't contact his brother. Moreover, in this situation, he didn't like the idea of the red thread between them being cut by Jeong Jaeui.

After muttering a bit about how he felt his luck was running out because the red thread with his brother was cut, Jeong Taeui suddenly looked at Ilay. He looked down at Jeong Taeui without any emotion on his face.

"Do you want to go?"

He didn't attach the place he wanted to go to the question, but Jeong Taeui understood clearly where he was talking about. Jeong Taeui remained silent for a moment and then sighed.

"If I want to go, will you let me?"

"No. Tonight, you will have to fly to Hong Kong with me."

Jeong Taeui's face dropped. What was the point of this guy playing with words all this time?

"Ilay, think about it. You're not someone who would fall for the same trick twice, and I know that too. And you know I wouldn't do that again. So, even if I go to Africa alone now to find my brother, you can find me immediately. There's no reason for me to go to Hong Kong with you. You can find me whenever you want, easily."

Jeong Taeui spoke seriously. Ilay then smirked.

"Taeil. You forgot one thing."

"What?"

"You said you hated being with me so much, didn't you? So, live in resentment by my side every day until you die."

"...."

Jeong Taeui had forgotten what he had said before. How foolish of him to forget even for a moment about the obstinate and violent nature of this monster.

Jeong Taeui got up without hesitation and stepped off the bed. He grabbed the shirt hanging on the chair and slipped it on, mumbling.

"Alright, let's go to that damn Hong Kong. Go ahead and throw me in prison or cement me and throw me into the sea, do whatever you want."

If they were leaving tonight, he didn't know when they'd depart, but he couldn't just sit around waiting. Even if he had no luggage, he still needed to get everything in order and bid farewell to Kyle and Rita. At the very least, he wanted to say goodbye in person, but he might have to send a message to Kyle since he had left for work right after the late breakfast. He would see him again someday, but he wanted to say goodbye properly.

Dammit. He had already resigned himself halfway when he was captured by this man, but the situation where he couldn't decide his own life was uncomfortable.

"As soon as there's a hint of someone's whereabouts, the news spreads immediately."

Ilay's voice echoed in Jeong Taeui's ear as he dressed with a displeased expression. Jeong Taeui muttered while glancing at Ilay.

"Alright. It's true that my brother's whereabouts being in Seringe could be leaked, and there would be plenty of people who could get him out without me lifting a finger."

That's why I'll go to Hong Kong. He muttered silently.

Creak The old wooden floorboards creaked, and he could feel Ilay standing up and taking a few steps toward him. Ilay reached out and touched Jeong Taeui's ear, caressing it gently but firmly. Jeong Taeui frowned at the sudden pain and turned his head away.

"I'm not talking about Jeong Jaeil."

"...—?"

Jeong Taeui shook his head, covering his ear with one hand, and looked at him curiously.

A rumor about someone's whereabouts, in this context, it should be about Jeong Jaeui, right?

Jeong Taeui tilted his head, staring at Ilay for a moment. Then, blinking a few times, he thought there must be something wrong, but Ilay remained silent as if he had no intention of explaining.

Jeong Taeui caught his gaze and frowned, speaking with surprise.

"Me...?"

"Yes, you."

Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay with a stunned face, slowly pointing at himself with his finger.

"Alright.... I see... but my uncle already knows where I am. So what?"

"If someone tries to steal my prey even for a moment, it wouldn't be pleasant. If I keep you in Hong Kong and go to the branch, in case of an emergency, I can handle it right away, but otherwise, as soon as I leave Germany, that person will act immediately."

Jeong Taeui stood in stunned silence for a moment.

This wasn't the first time the man had said things he couldn't understand. Before, he could get the gist, but now he couldn't grasp any of it. But Ilay wasn't someone who would say meaningless things, which meant his understanding was also declining.

But even so....

"There's no one after me except you...."

Jeong Taeui spoke in frustration. People say that humans tend to judge others based on themselves or their surroundings, but even so, his life was completely different from this man's. He didn't remember making any enemies or doing anything that would make someone want to kill him.

Surely, as Ilay said, Jeong Jaeil wasn't the only one missing here. Though for a much shorter period, Jeong Taeui had also been missing recently.

But Jeong Jaeil and Jeong Taeui were entirely different cases. No one wanted to find Jeong Taeui. He didn't know if there was someone on this earth who persistently hated him to the point of wanting to kill him—except for the man standing before him now.

"Why not? Just think of the first name that comes to mind..."

Ilay clicked his tongue and started to say something but then fell silent again. Taeui snorted and said.

"And then what?"

Jeong Taeui urged him, but Ilay just stared at him blankly. Jeong Taeui slowly averted his eyes, though he didn't recall doing anything wrong. If he didn't want to say it, why bring it up in the first place?

Ilay suddenly mumbled.

"Jeong Jaeil..."

"...?"

"Maybe it's more complicated than that."

Jeong Taeui frowned slightly. The subject continued in a roundabout way, and he couldn't keep up even when his brain was working at full capacity. Jeong Taeui sighed deeply. He tugged at his hair in frustration.

"So. So even though we don't know who, you're worried that someone with a grudge against me will snatch me from you and kill me first, so I have to go to Hong Kong with you? Otherwise, you'll make me suffer every day?"

He wanted to say it heavily to express his anger, but it didn't come out as strongly as he hoped. But the person listening wasn't someone Jeong Taeui had to care much about, so even though he wasn't satisfied, he wasn't angry.

Jeong Taeui thought while mumbling weakly. He had made a series of mistakes from escaping to being caught, and now things had turned out like this. He guessed people called this karma.

Since entering this room, Ilay's gaze had been fixed on Jeong Taeui as if he were thinking about something. He took out his phone and tossed it to Jeong Taeui. Reflexively, Taeui caught it and looked at the phone in his hand curiously.

"Do whatever you want. But the plan to go to Hong Kong won't change. We'll leave in 30 minutes, so call my brother and tell him I'm leaving. Calling directly will avoid unnecessary formalities."

"Alright."

Jeong Taeui responded, though not enthusiastically, and opened the contact list. Then he frowned.

Leaving in 30 minutes. He'd have to prepare everything in a roasting beans over a lightning bolt*.

(번갯불에 콩 볶아 먹겠네: roasting beans over a lightning bolt/ A phrase implying the nature of doing things hastily and immediately.)

There was no need to look for a number he had memorized. He looked up and asked Ilay as he walked toward the door.

"Didn't they say you came here on a private jet? So there's no fixed schedule. Why the rush, leaving in 30 minutes?"

If he calculated the time, including preparation and waiting for Kyle to return and having a last dinner together to say a proper goodbye, then boarding the private jet to return, there should be enough time.

"..."

Ilay stopped and slowly turned around. Seeing a slight hesitation on his otherwise expressionless face, Jeong Taeui quickly shifted his gaze back to the phone screen.

Right. The pilot wouldn't just wait quietly under his coercion. Moreover, if it wasn't a private jet but a UNHRDO specialized aircraft, its operational schedule was already set, and deviating from that plan wasn't the only obstacle.

"With such tight timing... did you already book the flight?"

Ilay, who had stepped out of the room, paused and replied to Taeui.

"Of course. Under the passport number JR0203314 of Kim Young Soo-ssi"

"...Your unparalleled skill at mocking others..."

Jeong Taeui mumbled. Ilay laughed out loud.

(김영수 씨: Ilay used Kim Young Soo ssi - 씨[ssi] is an honorific in Korean. In English, it's roughly equivalent to Mr. It seems like this is the first time 씨 has appeared in the whole of Volume 4 :v Basically, Ilay emphasized the name Kim Young Soo to mock Tae 😏)

After a while, Ilay turned back to Jeong Taeui, not looking reluctant at all but rather calm.

"Shut your mouth and follow me obediently. I won't stop you from meeting Jeong Jaeil."

"Huh?"

Jeong Taeui, holding the phone to his ear, looked at Ilay in confusion. He hadn't misunderstood; he heard correctly. But before Taeui could ask for confirmation, Ilay had left the room.

Jeong Taeui stared blankly at Ilay's retreating figure until he disappeared from sight. The beeping of the phone suddenly stopped, replaced by Kyle's voice on the other end, "What's going on?"

Vol 5 - Chapter 3: Lost in Hong Kong

Kyle was a busy man.

Even now, his right hand held a pen, his left hand a stack of documents that James had brought in five minutes ago, and his right ear was occupied with a call from across the ocean.

In fact, James had already reviewed and completed most of the tasks. By the time the documents reached Kyle, probably more than 90% of the work had been handled by James. James was a highly competent secretary. Despite his complaints, he had once sought psychological counseling due to prolonged stress from overwork, and even tried to resign. Kyle had no choice but to unconditionally sweeten the pot for him.

Today, after leaving home and arriving at the office following a late breakfast, Kyle sighed at the pile of work on his desk, exclaiming - "So much work."

But he had to shut his mouth under James's sharp gaze, knowing the man in front of him had worked through the night until 5am, got up at 7am to prepare for today's work, and picked up the boss at 9am.

James had seemingly given up on his boss. Kyle was undeniably a highly capable individual, regarded as a unicorn in the world. But he wasn't dedicated to his work. Without his top 1% brain, the company might have collapsed during its darkest times.

Understanding Kyle's erratic and lazy nature, James took care of the tasks himself, and anything that reached Kyle's hands was of utmost importance. Kyle appreciated James's handling of work, and naturally, James pocketed a considerable sum each month for his massive workload.

Therefore, when documents reached Kyle, they were undeniably 'must-see' papers.

"That's why I'm even more annoyed. Although I'm a bit lazy, I never do things sloppily, do I? Huh? Not even once. Really, not even once. Damn it. He's like a devil."

As James left after handing him the fax, Kyle began grumbling about him. On the other end of the phone, his friend across the ocean laughed.

["You could ask James to reduce your workload."]

And, as his friend predicted, Kyle jumped up.

"Are you kidding? If that guy really quits this time, I'm done for."

["Haha, I know. If James quits, let me know first. I must recruit him immediately. I'm sure many people out there want him as much as I do."]

"No, no. If you want James, take me too."

Kyle shivered at the thought of his bleak future without his incredibly capable secretary. Contrary to his weak voice on the phone, his eyes were cold and focused as he reviewed and annotated the documents on his desk.

At that moment, the phone in Kyle's pocket rang.

Kyle held the documents and pen in one hand and took out his phone with the other. He glanced at the number displayed on the screen and raised an eyebrow.

"What's this kid calling for?"

["Do you have another call? I'll get back to you later."]

"No, it's fine. It's Rieg. It's probably just about work and will be brief. But why is this kid calling me so soon after we just met?"

["Oh, Rieg? Maybe he's calling to say goodbye. He has to return to the branch by tomorrow."]

"Really? Then he has to leave today, right? But this kid isn't the type to do cute things like that. Wait a moment.... —What's up?"

Kyle put his friend's call on hold and answered the incoming call. His younger brother wasn't one to call without a reason or for trivial matters. Saying goodbye before leaving? Kyle couldn't even dream of it. His friend knew this, so it was obviously a joke.

However, answering Kyle's blunt question was a gentle, hesitant voice.

["Kyle, it's Jeong Taeui."]

"Taeui? Oh, it's you."

Kyle replied, then removed the phone from his ear to double-check the number on the screen. It was indeed his younger brother's number. Kyle, puzzled, spoke in a relaxed tone.

"What's up? This is Ilay's phone, right? Did he ask you to call me?"

Kyle half-jokingly asked. Jeong Taeui hesitated slightly on the other end.

["Well... I'll be going to Hong Kong soon. With Ilay. If I had known earlier, I would have said goodbye properly this morning, but it turned out like this... Sorry and thank you. You've helped me a lot during my time here."]

"Huh? You're leaving? When are you leaving?"

["In 30 minutes."]

Hearing Jeong Taeui's soft voice, Kyle fell silent for a moment.

"No, at least have dinner before you go. This is too sudden."

["Ah, I'd like that too, but it seems Ilay is in a hurry. He says he has to return to the Hong Kong branch by tomorrow."]

"That's his problem. Let him go first, and you can stay a bit longer, can't you?"

["Do I get a say in this?"]

"No, not a chance."

["Then I'll really die, won't I?"]

Jeong Taeui's voice suddenly became gloomy. Kyle's mood also sank. He understood the meaning behind those words. He had always thought no one could be as unfortunate as him for having such a peculiar younger brother, but now he felt there might be someone even more unfortunate.

"Alright, take care then. It's a shame, but next time you come to Germany, make sure to visit me."

["Okay, thank you very much."]

Neither Kyle nor the young man on the other end wanted to prolong the conversation. After a few more words, the call ended. Kyle sighed, put the phone back in his pocket, and stared at the ceiling for a moment before blinking and returning to the call he had put on hold.

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

["Only for a little over two minutes. Are you okay? I was handling some personal business. So, what did Rieg say?"]

"Just a farewell. The kid is heading to Hong Kong now."

["....."]

A brief silence followed. Surely, the person on the other end was pondering the connection between Rieg and a farewell.

"It was your nephew. I thought it was Ilay since it was his number, but it wasn't."

["Ah. Taeui? He's going to Hong Kong too? Not Tanzania?..... Oh, poor kid, caught by Rieg."]

Changin spoke slowly without a hint of jest - ["Poor kid."] - Kyle empathized with those words, remaining silent for a moment before suddenly muttering.

"Strange, this is really strange...."

The vague soliloquy slipped through the receiver, but his friend didn't press further. Well, was Kyle the only one who found this strange? He pondered for a while but reached no conclusion, so he asked his friend.

"What did Taeui do to Ilay?"

[".....Let's see. The kid endured quietly, but at some point, the tension must have exceeded its limit.....I bear some responsibility too."]

Even his friend's voice grew somber. Although Kyle still didn't fully understand, he decided to drop the subject. Because he had just reviewed all the faxes in his hands.

"By the way, your nephew.... – the genius who became the greatest public enemy at our research institute seems to be in Seringe."

["Do you have new information?"]

"Hmm. Maybe it's related to Abdul Rahman Abid al Saud."

["Abdul Rahman..... ah, yes... He's under Prince Al Faisal, right?"]

Kyle raised his eyebrows in silence.

While the information wasn't particularly surprising, his friend occasionally astounded him. Of course, Kyle knew there was an independent intelligence agency there, but knowing about that man was another matter.

"You know, he's an unremarkable man and seems to quietly hide himself. I searched for news about Jeong Jaeil everywhere and only faintly heard his name."

["No, it was just a coincidence. I happened to meet that man a few years ago. To be precise, we chatted a bit while waiting for Faisal as he was with the prince. Although a royal family member, his succession rank was very low, so I paid special attention to him."]

"You paid attention to him because of his low succession rank?"

["Well... – I felt sorry for the man."]

After carefully considering his words for a moment, Kyle mumbled, "Haa," as Changin spoke cautiously.

"He is a very unfortunate man... He takes good care of everyone and significantly contributed to Faisal's business development by changing direction early in the battle for the throne. Although this isn't widely known."

["Ah, sounds like the James of T&R, doesn't it?"]

Kyle licked his lips bitterly at his friend's mocking laughter.

"Well, that's not entirely wrong. If you mean he holds the real power. Anyway — — — It seems he has been secretly coercing our researchers over there."

["..... But as far as I know, Faisal doesn't dabble in weapons."]

"That's what I mean, there are a few cases to explain this. I need to look into it further to get a precise understanding."

["Hmm. Does Abdul Rahman have a villa in Seringe?"]

"Yes. He bought the most expensive area. Moreover, his health seems to have been deteriorating over the past year, so he rarely leaves there."

["Hmm"] - His friend on the other end murmured, and Kyle could feel him nodding slightly.

Kyle reviewed the documents Gable had sent him once again. He noted down information that needed verification. With this mass of data, if he threw it to James, he would likely receive a sharp look from him, complaining about the already heavy workload. If only everything could be resolved with money. But this wasn't a matter that could be settled with money anymore. (If James agreed to it, Kyle would be more than willing to spend money to get it done.)

"Changin, I'm scared of James."

Kyle sighed heavily as he read through the copious notes on the documents. His friend could only helplessly agree - ["Yes, indeed."] - not knowing how else to console him.

"So, you'll take responsibility for getting Jaeil out of there."

["Huh? Oh... Okay. But I don't know if it will succeed."]

"It's not just James who's scary. The head of our research institute is also terrifying. His eyes will turn bloodshot as soon as he gets his hands on Jeong Jaeil's products. He said he would dissect the 'damn genius's' brain before he dies. He's even determined to do it before he dies. He seriously considered joining a research course on brain structure dissection just to do it."

His friend laughed at Kyle's words. He sighed in frustration - "I'm not joking." - but the laughter on the other end continued.

["Well, if Gable has sniffed it out and contacted me, chances are Jaeui is really there. So we need to figure out why that lucky kid was kidnapped and held for months...."]

His friend on the other end murmured with a mix of laughter. Kyle replied succinctly, something Changin might have already thought about.

"It seems he doesn't want to leave."

There was no more reasonable explanation than that conclusion. Unless Jeong Jaeil's extraordinary luck had vanished overnight. But what could have caused his decades-long luck to suddenly disappear?

["Let's see... I wonder if the kid cut the red thread..."]

His friend suddenly muttered. Kyle raised an eyebrow at his friend's vague words, but he didn't elaborate. Kyle then pressed a button and called James to bring in the next set of

documents.

["Anyway, that's all the news I have for today. The rest is up to you."]

His friend seemed to be thinking about something for a moment, muttered something amidst a sigh, and hung up with a few parting words.

Today, the Lippo Center (Hong Kong)* looked different.

(The Lippo Center, formerly known as the Bond Center, is a skyscraper consisting of twin towers completed in 1988 at 89 Queensway, in Admiralty on Hong Kong Island, China.)

(Ilay booked a room for Tae facing this view. The T&R Hong Kong branch is also in this twin tower. =D)

Jeong Taeui suddenly had this thought and shook his head. No, not just today, it seems the day he can look at the Lippo Center normally will never come in his life. Unless the T&R branch moves out of there....

"No, even if it moves, this place is already etched in my mind."

Jeong Taeui absentmindedly gazed at the twin Lippo Towers through the clear glass and told himself. Chinese feng shui is truly mysterious. Jeong Taeui thought and turned away, taking a can of beer from the bar in the living room.

He had been in Hong Kong for several days, confined in a hotel room opposite the Lippo Center.

But compared to the definition of "confinement" in the dictionary, the reality was a bit different. Jeong Taeui could freely play in the casino or the hotel's bar for as long as he wanted, he could go outside and stroll around the city center. Although he didn't have many people to contact, he could call anyone he wanted.

Even now, Jeong Taeui had just returned after reading the book he bought a few days ago while wandering bored on the street.

"But no matter what, if there's someone watching, it's still like being imprisoned."

Jeong Taeui murmured softly. He didn't even know if this room had hidden cameras or listening devices. But he didn't care. They could listen all they wanted. He wasn't saying anything wrong. For days, it felt like he was trapped in an invisible prison.

Upon returning to Hong Kong, Ilay left Taeui alone in this hotel and went to the UNHRDO Asia branch. After disappearing without further explanation, leaving behind only a few words - *"Enjoy yourself here for a few days"* - Jeong Taeui stood dumbfounded for a while.

Ilay was gone.

Before he could even think about escaping, for the first time, Ilay turned his back on him and left.

For a moment, the thought of an unexpected opportunity flashed through his mind but quickly faded away.

Jeong Taeui would never run away just because Ilay disappeared before him unless he could come up with a sharper trick. Without a passport or other identification papers, leaving the country was impossible; it would be like illegal immigration. And, of course, he wasn't stupid enough to try entering another country illegally without any identification just to escape.

Identification.

That was the most basic requirement for doing something illegal. Without an identity, it was hard to accomplish anything. Safety-wise, there wasn't much he could do without one.

Jeong Taeui had considered creating a new fake identity and leaving again, but that thought was quickly extinguished as soon as it appeared in his mind. The man named Ilay wasn't one to fall for the same trick twice, and only a few "technicians" could create a perfect fake identity. Jeong Taeui had no way of contacting those "technicians" without going through a broker, and even if he tried, the thought of the person sitting opposite him being Ilay RieGrow sent shivers down his spine.

Alright then. Sitting quietly wouldn't be a death sentence in a life constantly teetering on the edge.

Jeong Taeui was lying on the bed when he suddenly woke up. He looked out the window.

The first thing that caught his eye was the magnificent Lippo Center. Jeong Taeui reflexively frowned. It was positioned so prominently that he wondered if Ilay had deliberately chosen this room. Jeong Taeui quickly turned away.

The sun had long set, but the streets below, as if untouched by darkness, were as bright as day. From this vantage point, the city seemed too foreign, and Jeong Taeui had to return here not long after he left.

He felt somewhat pathetic for trying so hard to escape...

Jeong Taeui scratched his head in confusion and turned around.

The first day back in Hong Kong - where he thought he wouldn't return for a long time, and in the future, from now on, he would be alone, so to reflect on that dark and painful future, Jeong Taeui decided to sit by the harbor, looking out at the Kowloon Peninsula and drinking beer alone.

Jeong Taeui thought that if he opened the room door, perhaps some bodyguards would stand to block his way. But even when he left the hotel, no one did. Jeong Taeui literally walked out of the hotel without having to deal with anyone. At that moment, though knowing it was

useless, he thought maybe it would be okay to escape this way. He took a few steps out. And then stopped abruptly.

"...."

Jeong Taeui sighed, looking up at the bright night sky, unable to see any stars.

Let's see, there's one guy behind me... two... no, just one...

While stepping out of the hotel, just ten steps away from the door, Jeong Taeui stopped and stared blankly at the sky. The staff standing outside looked at him curiously. And in the distance, a pair of eyes was watching him intently.

Jeong Taeui stood there for a moment, then smiled and continued walking with his still-healing limp.

Surely that guy didn't think everyone was a fool, Ilay knew that Taeui would soon realize someone was tailing him. With his injured leg, he wouldn't be able to escape even from a mediocre tail. Of course, there was no way Ilay would disappear while his prey was free outside the cage. More than that, this guy wasn't there to monitor him but was just a warning from Ilay that he was always aware of Taeui's every move. Everywhere he went was within an invisible cage.

In reality, this wasn't too unbearable. But it wasn't exactly pleasant either...

Jeong Taeui thought as he slowly walked down the road aimlessly as if taking a stroll. He wasn't sure, but he thought he could shake off this guy if he tried his best. He had ways to make the guy eat his dust if he were a normal opponent and his legs were healed; he could lose him like running a 100-meter sprint.

Even with his legs not fully healed, Jeong Taeui considered risking it but ultimately gave up. If the guy didn't intend to harm him, he didn't want to waste his energy on such a futile effort, as his fake identity was already exposed. Even if he managed to outwit the guy and leave Hong Kong safely, disappearing from Ilay RieGrow's grasp, he would soon be caught again.

If he escaped once more and got caught... Wow, just thinking about it made his life feel like heaven, literally. At that point, he might really have his limbs cut off.

Vol 5 - Chapter 4: The stalkers

When Jeong Taeui recalled the strange feeling when he encountered Ilay in the birch forest, his heart skipped a beat.

The sensation of being watched from behind was far from pleasant, but there was nothing he could do about it. Jeong Taeui entered a bookstore still open late at night, bought a book, went down the street to buy a drink, and wandered into a night market to get some snacks. Though not particularly interested, he even entered a camera store. Finally, Taeui found himself at the beach. He stepped into a small bar on the corner, had a few beers, and then returned to the hotel.

The stalker was still diligently tailing him, but he didn't interfere with anything, merely observing quietly. If he thought positively, having the stalker follow him was a hundred times better than having the gaze replaced by the man named Ilay Riegrow.

Since then, everything has continued just like that.

No matter where he went - from the moment he left the room, the gaze of that guy followed him relentlessly. However, he would not hinder Jeong Taeui in anything.

One day, wanting to see the extent of his current freedom, Jeong Taeui took his passport, wallet, and other necessary items and boarded a bus to the airport. He even boldly thought that if the guy didn't intervene, he would take the opportunity to slip out of the country. However, it seemed the limit wasn't that far. As soon as Jeong Taeui arrived at the airport, his phone rang.

Although the number was unfamiliar, he knew who was on the other end even before he pressed the answer button.

"No, I really don't intend to run away, I'm not that stupid." He answered the phone while racking his brain for a suitable excuse. However, it seemed Ilay already knew he would say that, so he wasn't too angry but spoke in a low, irritated voice.

"Anyway, you can't use your passport or Kim Young Soo's to leave the country right now. After checking the airport, return. It's difficult for me to go out now, so don't cause any more trouble."

Then he hung up without waiting for Jeong Taeui's response.

Jeong Taeui stood like a statue in the airport, staring at his phone. Ha, he laughed out loud. Banned from leaving the country? Ha, there was nothing those hands couldn't interfere with. It felt like he had become a dangerous criminal to be banned from leaving the country.

In the end, Jeong Taeui had no choice but to return as Ilay had instructed. That day, upon returning to the hotel, he drank up all the drinks at the small bar in his room. Starting with a bottle of water and moving on to the outrageously priced cocktails, he poured all the drinks

and snacks he could find – except for the beer – into the bathtub, knowing that the man born with a diamond spoon in his mouth wouldn't even bat an eye at these expensive items. To him, it was like dropping a penny.

But now, thinking back...

"...If he asks me to pay for the room when I check out, I'll suffer a huge loss..."

Jeong Taeui regretted his actions and glared at the Lippo Center.

Today was almost over. The day after tomorrow was Friday.

If Ilay's schedule remained the same, he would go to the Lippo Center to handle work at the company, which meant he would return to Hong Kong the day after tomorrow. Perhaps Jeong Taeui's brief time of playing around had come to an end. But even so, what did he intend to do with him? Anyway, Ilay would return to the branch during the weekdays. And Jeong Taeui was no longer a member of UNHDRO, unable to return there.

Jeong Taeui didn't think he would continue letting him stay in the hotel like this. There was no way he would go out every weekend to torment him and then leave him alone for the rest of the week.

That wasn't possible. He wasn't some little lover waiting obediently for Ilay here during his business trips.

Jeong Taeui pondered and suddenly pressed his lips together, the taste of beer no longer strong... He slumped down on the bed, muttering a strange sound.

"Have you really gone this far, Jeong Taeui... haizzzzzzz."

Jeong Taeui struggled to clear his head of weird thoughts, exhausted, and collapsed on the bed, staring helplessly at the ceiling.

Suddenly, a vague voice crossed his mind.

"Shut up and follow me obediently. I didn't forbid you from seeing Jeong Jaewi."

"....."

He hadn't misheard.

Jeong Taeui stared blankly at the ceiling and sat up. He wouldn't prevent him from seeing his brother; Ilay really said that.

At least, from what Taeui knew about him, the man named Ilay Riegrow was extremely unpredictable and hard to get along with, but he never made empty promises. If he said so, it meant just that. In fact, perhaps those words were what made Jeong Taeui stay obediently in the hotel, only occasionally going for walks.

"Could he be planning to bring my brother here?"

The thought crossed Jeong Taeui's mind and disappeared without a trace. The idea was immediately dismissed. Jeong Jaeui being captured by someone? It was impossible to imagine.

Of course, the most likely scenario behind his words could be - *"I might let you go and find your brother if you behave properly..."*

Ilay might suddenly change his mind and decide to treat him kindly, who knows.

"...People's perspectives on things change over time, don't they?"

But the thought of Ilay suddenly becoming kind seemed as likely as Jeong Jaeui being held captive by someone.

Among the many scenarios Jeong Taeui could think of, one seemed most reasonable given the actual situation. It involved mutual benefits.

Finding Jeong Jaeui could be a threat to some, but it would also bring solid profits to the organizations and corporations Ilay was involved with. Not only that, those organizations - from Taeui's perspective - wouldn't just see Jeong Jaeui as an ordinary person anymore. In other words, letting Jeong Taeui find and bring Jeong Jaeui would only benefit those organizations and, by extension, Ilay Riegrow. Since Jeong Taeui couldn't return to UNHDRO, and Ilay could easily find him no matter where he hid, Ilay would gain significantly by putting aside petty grudges and letting him search for Jeong Jaeui.

Jeong Taeui spoke gloomily - "...But... I don't like that at all."

He just wanted to meet his brother.

He hadn't even considered rescuing or bringing his brother back. He simply wanted to meet him, exchange a few words, and alleviate his longing before saying, "Bye bye, hyung. See you again."

Jeong Taeui scratched his head and licked his lips.

But even so, if his freedom meant trading his brother, Jeong Taeui might be willing to accept that for his own peace of mind.

These thoughts lingered in his mind, making his heart and mind feel heavier. Jeong Taeui ruffled his already messy hair, only able to lament his unlucky fate.

Suddenly, he sprang up. Although he had just returned to his room, the best way to clear a troubled mind was to keep his body active. He knew that if he continued to wallow in such thoughts like a depressed person, that depression would only grow like a monster and eventually consume him. That feeling was never pleasant.

Half an hour after leaving the hotel, Jeong Taeui was sitting on a bench, sipping on a can of orange juice while gazing at the sky darkening into night. He quietly reflected.

Why did he now have two tails?

At first, Jeong Taeui hadn't noticed. But after having one tail for the past few days, he had grown used to it. Jeong Taeui did nothing to hide, nor did he plan to dash to the port and hop on a ship to escape. As long as he didn't go too far, his followers wouldn't interfere with anything he did. So, having an additional tail wasn't a problem.

Jeong Taeui downed the rest of the orange juice, held the straw in his mouth, and thought deeply. It wasn't because he had pretended to flee at the airport, was it? Ilay knew he had no real intention of doing so, merely causing a bit of trouble. Yet, sending another person to watch him seemed unnecessary.

Jeong Taeui sighed. The tail Ilay had sent to watch him couldn't even be called a proper overseer. If he truly wanted to, Jeong Taeui could easily lose him.

"No matter how incapable my body is of running away, this is too much... It's not that I want a super skilled shadow, but this level of surveillance is..."

On the positive side, maybe Ilay had sent the extra tail to play along with him.

"If that's the case... let's play."

Being watched like this was boring. Jeong Taeui decided to have a little fun with his tails. He stuffed his hands into his pockets and began walking slowly. As if just taking a stroll (which he was), Taeui walked up a gentle slope, looking out into the distance.

There were many people around. If he walked up a few more blocks, he would find antique shops and a place frequented by film crews. Going down a bit led to a major road, so even at sunset, the area was bustling.

Crowded places were usually chaotic. Perfect.

Following someone meant knowing the geography of the surrounding areas, but chasing someone was always much harder than fleeing.

Jeong Taeui began to pick up the pace. He turned into a narrow alley and walked to the end, then turned toward the main street and slowly made his way to the large road outside.

He couldn't catch a taxi here. Fine, this would be a game of cat and mouse, a real chase.

If he crossed the main road and walked down further, he would reach a traditional market not well-known to tourists, meant for locals. Jeong Taeui smirked as he walked past the unremarkable market.

.....Ah. His tails had increased. Hold on, we need a suitable place to play.

Jeong Taeui hummed happily, looking around before turning back.

Earlier on his walk, he had noticed a suitable spot, a seemingly safe alley, and decided to head back there. If he was being loosely followed, it was fine, but if closely pursued, it could

be dangerous. One block away was a maintenance area, and getting lost there during the day was tough enough. If he ended up there, he would have to run, but his injured leg wouldn't allow it.

"Hmmm... that place might be better."

La la la, Jeong Taeui hummed in his throat. He seemed to be in a very good mood. If you think about it from another perspective, being tailed like this wasn't so bad. Of course, he didn't like being followed, but it was better than being pursued by Ilay himself.

Imagine if the man tailing him was Ilay Riegrow...

"...Why do I keep having such scary thoughts... My heart must be sick."

Jeong Taeui rubbed his mouth and mumbled, his laughter fading. If the person tailing him was Ilay, he wouldn't be able to play around like this. If Ilay was after him, he would only be able to run in desperation...

"Oh, no, no, why do you keep thinking about such things, Jeong Taeui?"

Jeong Taeui rubbed his lips hard enough to make them bleed. The thought had just passed through his mind for a moment, and it had already made his hair stand on end... It was like a horror story. If that really happened, the moment he felt Ilay grab his shoulder, he would die of a heart attack. Thinking back to when he ran into Ilay in the birch forest, he was surprised he didn't faint. Truly, he had to commend himself for being so brave.

Jeong Taeui rubbed his goosebump-covered arms in the sweltering summer heat. He had reached the place he had seen a while ago.

It was a bridge about one and a half stories high.

It was lower than the overpass on the edge of the main road, perched over a maze of narrow alleys. But jumping from that height wasn't easy.

Jeong Taeui placed his hand on the bridge railing and quietly looked down. The footsteps of his tails behind him also slowed down. Perhaps noticing Jeong Taeui's unusual behavior, their eyes were full of caution as they kept a certain distance.

"If you see something strange, you should immediately chase and drag me back, shouldn't you... these people..."

Jeong Taeui muttered helplessly as he looked down at the dark alley below. His gaze wandered around until he spotted a large rock a few steps away. It was heavy enough to be held in one hand, resembling a piece of broken brick.

Below the overlapping rooftops under the overpass, there was a protruding hook like the end of a chimney. Jeong Taeui tossed the rock up and caught it, then threw it hard at the hook. A loud ****Clang**** echoed as the rock shattered into two or three pieces and fell, but the hook remained unscathed.

"Alright... even if I fall from this height, I can't die... at most, I'll get hurt a bit."

Jeong Taeui twisted his wrist and mumbled - "Getting injured while playing like this is really unfair." - and took a deep breath.

The next moment, Jeong Taeui turned towards the watchful eyes, waved brightly like a friendly pageant contestant, and then jumped over the railing, throwing himself off the overpass.

Jeong Taeui could hear screams echoing from afar.

Vol 5 - Chapter 5: Pursuit

The pursuers hurried to the edge of the overpass. Jeong Taeui was falling, the walls quickly gliding past him. Midway down, the protruding latch appeared before him. Jeong Taeui stretched out both hands and grabbed the latch. If it broke, he would probably end up with another broken leg.

"—....!!!!"

Jumping from such a height and grabbing onto a protruding latch to support his body weight was no easy task. Holding on meant all his weight was now on his arms. Jeong Taeui grimaced. It was so slippery; one hand slipped off the latch. He quickly brought up his other hand, using it to grip the latch again. Jeong Taeui's body trembled, swinging like a pendulum, but gradually the swings slowed.

"Alright... that was dangerous, really dangerous."

Jeong Taeui muttered in shock after securing his grip on the latch. His body swayed, the movements slowing down. When he looked up, he saw several men running towards the overpass above him. When Taeui looked down again, the distance to the ground was about 2 meters.

For the first time, Jeong Taeui clearly saw the faces of the men who had been tailing him. He smiled and whispered - "Goodbye." - not knowing if they could hear him or not. His feet soon touched the ground. Jeong Taeui winced – it hurt more than the last time. He had tried to put all his weight on his good leg, but still, some plaster crumbled to the ground, the pain shooting up his leg as if it might break. Even his good leg didn't feel much better.

Jeong Taeui managed to get up despite the dizziness but had to sit back down for a few moments with a groan - "Awww...". After a while, he could stand and walk, confirming that his ankle was sore but not seriously injured. He immediately began to run.

Looking at the faces of the men, stunned and reluctant to jump down, Jeong Taeui felt a bit sorry for them, so he smiled and shouted loud enough for them to hear.

"See you back at the hotel. I'm just going for a walk."

Jeong Taeui turned and hobbled away as fast as he could, pretending not to hear the shouts from the overpass behind him. He couldn't make out what they were saying, but it didn't matter since they were yelling in Chinese anyway.

Jeong Taeui quickly left the area and only stopped when he felt he had successfully shaken off his pursuers.

Escaping like this was easy – perhaps they had been too careless. The farther he could get, the better, but he had no confidence that he wouldn't be caught again within a week.

"I wonder if I've just done something pointless. Tomorrow there might be three more tails."

Despite his words, Jeong Taeui felt no regret. He walked leisurely. His legs throbbed, but his heart felt incredibly light. Jeong Taeui tapped lightly on the cast on his leg, thinking, "This body is stronger than I thought."

Anyway, where am I now?

He could roughly guess his location since he had walked in a straight line. Jeong Taeui slowly turned into a side street, enjoying the fresh scenery of the unfamiliar path.

It was a quiet residential area, occasionally dotted with small shops, devoid of people, shrouded in darkness.

Even though he was being monitored, Jeong Taeui sometimes wandered around as if he wasn't being followed, but the freedom to stroll without any tails had a special taste. Jeong Taeui sighed deeply.

Initially, he had planned to return to the hotel a bit earlier since he had nowhere else to go. He headed straight for the main road, intending to return. But, feeling unusually relaxed, he decided to take his time.

A shabby little restaurant appeared before him. It was dinner time, so Jeong Taeui decided to go in. Perhaps because he was in such a good mood, even though it wasn't a particularly great restaurant, he was very satisfied with the meal. The kind owner even brought him tea and fruit, so he stayed a bit longer. By the time he left the shop, it was late, and the night had fully descended.

"Alright, let's head back."

Today, he thought he could fall into a deep sleep with a very pleasant mood, even if he received a scolding call from Ilay upon his return. Jeong Taeui stretched and moved forward, heading through narrow alleys towards the main road.

It was then.

Jeong Taeui's steps slowed a bit before returning to their usual pace.

They had caught up to him.

"Better than I thought..."

Feeling their approach from a distance, Jeong Taeui smiled faintly. He had managed to shake them off but was now being tailed again. It didn't ruin his mood. It felt as if he had returned to reality after playing a very fun game, so he didn't feel particularly bothered.

Jeong Taeui planned to return to the hotel quietly, walking slowly, indifferent to whether they followed him or not. The narrow alley leading to the main road was not crowded. In the quiet alley, Jeong Taeui's footsteps echoed clearly.

The moon hung high in the sky. Jeong Taeui walked slowly, savoring the moonlight with a leisurely mind. But then, his steps suddenly slowed.

A strange feeling heightened his alertness.

The footsteps behind him continued, even when Jeong Taeui stopped.

Not only behind him but also from a nearby alley ahead, the sound of rushing footsteps approached.

He had a hunch.

Even if it was just a passerby, his body moved before he could think.

He sprinted towards the approaching footsteps and suddenly swung his fist at the man standing before him. The man quickly slowed down and dodged his punch.

And he immediately punched back.

.....Bingo.

Thankfully, the man wasn't just a passerby. Though having someone run at him from behind wasn't exactly lucky.

"Hey, hello...are you really attacking me because of that little prank...—"

Whoosh, the sound of wind brushed past Jeong Taeui's nose. His words stopped.

"What the...no, are you kidding me... Punching like that could kill me. Wait, I'm heading back to the hotel. I'm on my way back to the hotel, you guys."

Jeong Taeui yelled, dodging with all his might, but it was futile. The two men swung their fists brutally without saying a word. It seemed they were determined to take him down and drag him away.

Jeong Taeui worriedly clicked his tongue.

These guys were different from the ones on the overpass earlier. Indeed, he had thought there were two groups tailing him, and these seemed to be the second group.

Fuck. The first guys could be easily toyed with, but why are these guys resorting to violence now?

Jeong Taeui looked around. Even in a small alley with few people, there should at least be someone passing by...just as he thought this, he saw a figure entering the alley from afar. Truly, the heavens didn't cut off all paths of escape.

But it wasn't luck. Because someone appeared, the men attacked more violently to quickly capture him. One of them even pulled something out from his chest – a gray spray can without any labels. Jeong Taeui frowned. Based on his experience, such things rarely meant

anything good. Nine out of ten, it was an anesthetic or paralyzing agent. If they had to resort to using such things, they must be in a hurry.

"These guys are crazy...why are they doing this all of a sudden?"

Jeong Taeui yelled, blocking the first man's kick with his elbow, cursing under his breath, and kicking the second man with his plastered leg.

Both he and the second man screamed in pain simultaneously. Jeong Taeui thought his ankle was going to be ruined. His eyes reflexively watered. The spray can rolled before him, and he quickly picked it up, bashing it over the first man's head.

What the hell are they doing? Why are they suddenly making such a fuss and ganging up on me?

The blows were so strong that the spray can dented on one side. Jeong Taeui squeezed the man's neck, spraying continuously into his face. A scream of pain sounded, then began to fade.

Finally, Jeong Taeui used all his strength to slam the spray can into the remaining man's head and ran away.

Damn it, Ilay, am I dealing with all this just because I turned off my phone and played a little prank on your underlings? In a situation where it's clear I can't get far, isn't this a bit too much?

Jeong Taeui rushed onto the main road, cursing under his breath and glancing back. There were no signs of pursuit; it seemed those men were unconscious in the alley. He wasn't going back to check on them.

Jeong Taeui hailed a taxi just as it approached. Only after giving the hotel name and the taxi started moving did he let out a long sigh. His throbbing leg now felt like it was on fire. He feared it might end up paralyzed at this rate.

"I get it... this is your way of torturing people."

Jeong Taeui leaned back against the seat, closed his eyes, and muttered: "Then why let me roam freely these past few days?"

For a gambling addict, this place was paradise, with a casino accessible any time. Now, he even had a thick wad of money to spend freely (although it was someone else's money).

No matter how much money there was, losing it deliberately in a few bets would be quick work. Fortunately, Jeong Taeui had little interest in gambling.

He could enjoy betting tens or even hundreds of dollars if his pockets were full (even if it was someone else's money x2) without feeling regretful about losing it all. He could enjoy it, but

the people here didn't have the right attitude, and he didn't like losing money to professionals he couldn't outsmart.

So, he just played poker or a few games on the green table inside the casino to "enjoy the moment."

Yesterday, after returning to the hotel, Jeong Taeui stayed inside, not stepping out.

He had wanted to go for a leisurely walk to enjoy the atmosphere, but if it meant being chased again, he preferred to lock himself in. Besides, his ankle was on the verge of giving out.

His injured ankle had been overworked repeatedly. The good leg wasn't much better, so he couldn't keep going.

Jeong Taeui got out of the taxi, hobbled to the elevator, and by the time he reached his room, he could barely stand. As soon as he stepped inside and closed the door, he collapsed to the floor. His ankle throbbed painfully, and despite holding his breath while spraying the sedative, he had inhaled some. The floor seemed to spin and dance before his eyes.

Not really, right? These were his last thoughts before losing consciousness.

When he woke up the next day, Jeong Taeui found himself lying at the doorway. It was already midday, and he had slept for over twelve hours.

Fortunately, the headache wasn't too bad, so the sedative wasn't of poor quality. Jeong Taeui woke up, but his ankle was still sore, and he was hungry and thirsty. The sleep had helped him recover somewhat. He could walk, albeit with a limp, but he had no desire to leave the room and stroll around anymore.

Even today, he didn't leave his room. He ordered a simple meal from room service, threw himself onto the bed, and picked up a book he hadn't touched. He shook his ankle, noting the pain had lessened, and then settled in to enjoy his time alone.

He waited to see if Ilay would contact him for going beyond the surveillance range – if he did, Jeong Taeui was ready to complain about how the tails had hurt his ankle to the point of immobility – but surprisingly, he didn't hear from him. Ilay probably confirmed that Jeong Taeui had returned to his room, meaning he wouldn't intervene as long as Jeong Taeui shook off the tails and quietly returned.

Jeong Taeui spent the whole day in his room, eating, playing, and sleeping. Eventually, he had to go outside due to boredom. He didn't want to leave the hotel, so he explored and enjoyed its services. The best place for entertainment was the casino, but unfortunately, he wasn't interested in that, so he left after a few games.

Jeong Taeui didn't find idleness that terrible. He had spent months at home after being discharged from the military before joining UNHRDO. There wasn't much difference between then and now, except he didn't have the means to meet friends regularly. He went out when he wanted, read and ate what he liked, and could sleep whenever he wanted. Unlike

before, he no longer worried about 'what to do for a living' or 'needing to make money soon'.

Sure enough, there was only one problem.

This peace would inevitably be shattered. The uncertainty of when it would end made it impossible to relax and enjoy this leisure time.

"Damn. If only I could go to Seringe alone and try to find a clue about my brother."

Jeong Taeui constantly grumbled.

If he had nothing to do, he might as well find something to entertain himself.

Jeong Taeui left the casino and went to the ground floor. He stopped at the last step of the stairs.

The sound of a piano echoed in the lobby. The hall was filled with soothing jazz melodies. The sun had already set through the window in front of the garden. This song would be perfect to listen to after three or four hours.

It was a song his mother occasionally sang on quiet moonlit nights when he was a child. Hearing it again for the first time in a long while calmed his confused emotions. Jeong Taeui sat on a chair in the café in front of the lobby. He ordered a cup of tea and enjoyed the piano tunes before thinking about returning to his room.

A man was glancing at his watch and flipping through files, as if waiting for someone. Their eyes met for a moment.

As soon as he saw him, he didn't have to think long. Come to think of it, they had met before, right here in this hotel, in this lobby. Only the table's position was different.

He was an arms dealer who had previously dealt with Jeong Taeui.

"Ah..."

"Um....." Although the distance wasn't far, it was too far to talk directly. Jeong Taeui got up and walked over.

Though he wasn't someone Jeong Taeui could warmly greet, seeing a familiar face after days without anyone to talk to felt somewhat comforting.

Since returning to Hong Kong, Taeui hadn't spoken to anyone he knew. The only people he interacted with were hotel staff and shop employees.

"Long time no see. Do you have business here?"

"Oh, yes. It's been a while since I've seen you here. Are you alone?"

The dealer responded cheerfully. Jeong Taeui replied, "Yes." and sat in the opposite chair.

Though he had only met the man a few times, striking up a conversation wasn't as difficult as he had thought. Maybe it was because both had engaged in some illegal dealings, making it hard to be too open. Especially since both sides shared some secrets, Jeong Taeui and the man exchanged subtle smiles.

"What about the enthusiastic friend who was with you last time? He said he used that item well, and it seemed there were no issues with the quality. After talking with him, I thought he was more professional than the professionals."

After a few greetings, the man, as if remembering something, spoke up. Jeong Taeui frowned. It was because he involuntarily recalled the face of that bastard from the man's story.

If the person he mentioned was that damn bastard, then he must be reveling in his room at UNHRDO, surrounded by 'Beautiful women'. Jeong Taeui spoke softly with a faint smile, "Yes, the last time I met him, everything seemed to be going well."

The guy was so obsessed with those things. One day, Jeong Taeui would go in front of him, rummage through every corner of his room, and pour sulfuric acid on those weapons.

Because of his deep-seated hatred for Morer, when Ilay was preparing to go to the UNHRDO branch, Jeong Taeui clung to him, saying he wanted to go with him instead of being left at the hotel.

Yes, at that moment, the expression on Ilay's face was quite strange. The man must have been very surprised when Jeong Taeui suddenly said he wanted to accompany him. Ilay tilted his head and looked at him for a while, unable to guess the reason, so he briefly asked, "Why?"

"I have some business with Morer."

Seeing Taeui's intense and serious reaction, Ilay finally understood. Aha, he nodded a few times and then replied curtly.

"No. You know, you're no longer a member of UNHRDO. Outsiders can't enter without a valid reason."

"No, I'll just meet him for a bit and then leave right away. I won't do anything else."

After saying that, Taeui's hand, which was gripping Ilay's sleeve, tightened. Ilay glanced down at his hand and coldly brushed it off.

"Rules are rules."

Jeong Taeui wanted nothing more than to squeeze that cold mouth shut and shake it until all the ice melted from his body. Since when did this guy follow the rules so well?

Facing Taeui's fierce glare, Ilay smoothed the wrinkled part of his sleeve with his fingertips and continued.

"Besides, if you think about it, it's thanks to that guy that I was able to find you."

Exactly. That was the root of the hatred between him and that bastard. Such deep-seated hatred that even if Morer was captured or shot, it wouldn't soothe it. Of course, just because he hated Morer didn't mean Ilay held a grudge against him too.

It was because of that guy that Ilay caught him! ———He couldn't even convey this deep hatred to Ilay, so he could only breathe angrily. Jeong Taeui thought for a moment and then muttered to himself.

"But... if it weren't for that prototype, he probably wouldn't have told you where I was even if he knew. Even before I was kidnapped, he never said anything even though he was regularly in touch with the branch."

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue in disapproval. That's right, if it weren't for that crazy obsession with guns, Morer probably wouldn't have sold him out to Ilay in exchange for that gun. No matter how bad their relationship was, Morer wasn't that kind of person. He wouldn't deliberately report Jeong Taeui's whereabouts to Ilay just to drag him down.

That's how it was.

And this is the result.

"Damn it."

Seeing Jeong Taeui's long face of dissatisfaction, Ilay suddenly extended his hand.

His smooth, white hand reached out towards him. Jeong Taeui instinctively stepped back. He didn't think about it; it was just a reflex. It was purely instinct. He had seen that smooth, white hand stained with dark red blood so many times. So, not being afraid at all would have been more unreasonable.

But as soon as he stepped back half a step, a feeling of regret flooded his mind.

Seeing Ilay's hand pause in mid-air and his slightly furrowed brow, Jeong Taeui knew he had made a mistake.

<Ahaha, I apologize for today. I have a lot of deadlines to meet, so I can only post one chapter. Tomorrow, I will post as usual. Additionally, I have posted the timeline of the Passion series on the Facebook Page. Please support ~~~ (☆ ㄹ ㄹ)>

Vol 5 - Chapter 6: Open your mouth, Taeil (18+)

But if it were someone else, they might not have stepped back. Jeong Taeui didn't mean to, it was just his survival instinct kicking in strongly at that moment. No, perhaps he wouldn't have backed off but instead would have counterattacked or even chopped off that hand.

Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay with wide eyes, blinking rapidly, his brain desperately coming up with excuses for his actions.

Ilay hesitated, then looked at his hand, turning it over and examining his palm. He slowly curled his little finger and then clenched his entire hand into a fist. It was a perfect fist to land on someone.

"No, I didn't mean anything by it. I just... Eh, if it were you, if someone like you suddenly reached out like that, it would be like wanting to slit my throat!"

Jeong Taeui prepared his excuses, muttering tearfully as he faced Ilay's cold gaze. Ilay was silent for a while, probably nine times out of ten contemplating whether or not to hit him with that fist.

As if to confirm Jeong Taeui's thoughts, Ilay looked at the fist in his hand with a serious expression, then slowly spread his fingers before closing them again. And then that hand approached Taeui once more.

This time, although he was still a bit hesitant, Taeui didn't step back. He looked down at that hand and nervously hunched his shoulders.

"What's wrong..."

Jeong Taeui asked in a soft voice as he saw Ilay's hand coming close to his neck. Ilay responded briefly.

"Your neck. Come here."

"..."

Had he made a mistake? Was Ilay really going to slit his throat?

Jeong Taeui silently stared at that hand. Those smooth, pale hands now looked truly terrifying... Even though it wasn't the first time he had seen those beautiful hands, no matter how familiar they were to him, it didn't lessen the cold, brutal feeling they exuded. Even as Taeui remained silent, staring at him, it seemed he had no intention of lowering his hand.

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue. In desperation, he leaned his body towards Ilay, as if pleading for the remaining shred of humanity in his heart. Ilay's fingertips lightly touched his neck.

At that moment.

Ilay's hand encircled Taeui's neck in a grip that made him feel like he couldn't breathe. The rough knuckles pressed against his carotid artery, causing him to choke momentarily. As Ilay loosened his grip slightly, he frowned and used his other hand to grasp Taeui's chin, pulling him closer. From these decisive actions, it was clear Ilay was not in a good mood.

Jeong Taeui held his breath. Ilay's lips closed over his, leaving no room to breathe, forcing him to comply.

It seemed Ilay didn't care whether he could breathe or not, as he explored every corner of Taeui's mouth, sucking on his tongue when Taeui tried to pull away and then biting hard. A short scream escaped, quickly swallowed by Ilay's mouth.

The hand that was holding Jeong Taeui's chin moved down, caressing his firm yet soft back, then comfortably settled on his buttocks. Jeong Taeui instinctively pulled his body forward, wrapping his arms behind him once or twice to block the mischievous hand that was roughly playing with his peaches. But Ilay didn't stop, he even moved closer. He placed his hand on Jeong Taeui's butt and once again pulled him towards his lower waist, slowly caressing his slender waist. His hips kept pushing and rubbing against both their lower bodies until a certain point when he confirmed that Jeong Taeui had understood his intentions. Then, he suddenly let go.

Both of Ilay's hands left Taeui as if nothing had happened.

Jeong Taeui coughed a few times and stepped back. He wiped his mouth while gasping for air, glaring at Ilay.

Ilay wasn't looking at Jeong Taeui, his gaze was on his watch. It seemed he didn't have much time left to catch the last train from Hong Kong to the UNHRDO Asia branch.

Jeong Taeui snapped out of it and quickly checked his own watch. Instinctively, he realized there was a strong correlation between Ilay's remaining time and the bulge forming in his pants.

Clicking his tongue in frustration, Ilay glanced at his watch again. Confirming that Ilay had no more time left, Jeong Taeui patted his chest and sighed in relief.

"You better go quickly. Too bad, I wish I could go with you, but yes, rules are rules."

No matter what, his own safety was the first thing he needed to worry about. Jeong Taeui wasn't someone who would stubbornly seek revenge and hurt himself in the process. Thank goodness. If he had stayed five more minutes, Ilay would probably have immediately jumped in and done it once before hurriedly leaving.

Go on, go quickly.

Jeong Taeui silently urged himself while also staring at this perplexing man.

Of course, everyone has their own inexplicable quirks, and this was Ilay's. Sometimes – usually in situations like this – Ilay's snake-like eyes would coldly fix on his body as if he

desired him, especially when his lower clothes were removed. It was utterly baffling.

Choosing to resort to rape as a way to humiliate the other party for revenge is very far-fetched, isn't it? In fact, Jeong Taeui didn't feel humiliated at all, but Ilay decided to have sex with someone he didn't like. Is that supposed to be good? And he even seemed to enjoy it!

Jeong Taeui tilted his chin towards the door and signaled: "You're going to be late, hurry up and go."

Ilay raised an eyebrow. His pale hand, which had been teasing the bulge in his pants, suddenly paused.

"You look so pale. Are you really that desperate to think I don't have enough time?"

The whispered words brushed past his ear with a slight chuckle. Damn. He wondered why his spine felt chilled when Ilay laughed like that.

While Taeui was lost in his thoughts, Ilay had already reached for his belt buckle. The sound of metal clinking echoed in the quiet room. Hearing the belt hit the floor, Jeong Taeui glanced at the clock again. Sure, there was still some time left, but every moment was slipping away quickly. Surely, he wouldn't have enough time to drag him to bed.

"Hey, you have to get back to the branch today... —/"

"Oh, that's right. I will return there soon —Uhm, you mentioned you had some business with Morer, right? I'll handle that for you. When I return, I'll bring you a gift, so you must wait here for me for the next few days. After what happened, I can't rest yet."

"Yes, that's good, but you don't have time anymore... —"

"Suck it."

Ilay said seriously. Jeong Taeui stared at him, speechless. Ilay was gently holding and shaking the massive thing that had risen through his open zipper.

"I don't have time, so let's finish this simply."

"Open your mouth."

"You bastard. Are you really going to do this now... —"

"The faster time passes, the more anxious my heart becomes. I'll keep my promise. But before that, let's finish this nicely for both sides. At least while I still have time to tell you."

Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay in shock as he calmly said - "I still have plenty of time to do that before I go." - Ilay reached out and pushed Taeui's shoulder down. Jeong Taeui quickly swatted Ilay's hand away and yelled.

"What do you mean, good for both sides! Only you enjoy it!"

"Hmm?"

Ilay raised an eyebrow and whispered - "A ha" - with a smile.

"Alright. I get it. Fine, next time I'll repay you with interest. You know, I don't have time now. Open your mouth..... If you dare bite, I'll break your jaw."

"Wait, I don't need to repay anything, I'm fine, hey, wait, Ilay... ——!"

Jeong Taeui remembered very clearly what he said at that moment. He could also vividly recall the scene that began with embarrassment and ended with his own crying moans mixed with Ilay's satisfied, coarse laughter.

"This is how you get used to it. Even if you don't like it initially, if you come into contact with it more often, you'll become more familiar and comfortable with it."

"Yeah, right! It almost tore my throat apart!!!!"

Only after Jeong Taeui inadvertently yelled did he notice the presence of the broker sitting in front of him. The broker blinked in surprise at Taeui.

"Oh no, I'm sorry... I was just thinking about something else for a moment. I've been a bit... busy lately."

Jeong Taeui hastily apologized, scratching the back of his neck nervously. He could feel his whole body, especially his earlobes, heating up. Jeong Taeui cursed under his breath.

The more he tried to forget, the more those memories flooded back into his mind. Jeong Taeui could only cover his mouth and bow his head. He didn't need a mirror to know how embarrassed he looked. His entire face was flushed, and his expression, likely tear-stained from that memory, was undoubtedly shameful.

His mouth throbbed with a dull ache. Ilay had grabbed his chin and forced his mouth open.

Damn it.

The moment that enormous piece of flesh touched the back of his throat, Jeong Taeui felt like he couldn't breathe. It wasn't an exaggeration, he literally couldn't breathe. The sensation of that thing hitting his throat made him reflexively want to vomit, but he couldn't expel anything because that huge rod had completely occupied his mouth. Jeong Taeui could only whimper and struggle.

He really wanted to just bite it off.

No, if he could, he would bite it off immediately without any further thought.

However, regardless of how he felt or how much he wanted to do it—Ilay's hands suddenly gripped his chin harder. Jeong Taeui wanted to scream that it hurt, but he couldn't get any words out as that massive thing blocked his throat. He felt like his mouth was being torn apart under the brutal pressure.

Vol 5 - Chapter 7: Are you waiting for me?

The memory of that day makes his teeth ache every time he recalls it.

Damn it. Jeong Taeui had tried hard to erase that memory, and he thought he had managed to forget some parts, yet he still remembers it so clearly and vividly.

Jeong Taeui shook his head vigorously, feeling like he would collapse if he kept recalling the warmth and taste lingering in his mouth from that time.

He looked at the broker with wide eyes, and the broker looked back at him with a curious expression. Their eyes met for a moment.

"You look pale today... Are you okay?"

"Oh no, I'm fine. By the way, how's your work going? From what I've heard, it seems like investigations are becoming more intense these days, it must be tough."

Jeong Taeui changed the subject. He felt it would be a hundred times better to talk about something else and focus entirely on it.

"It's been suppressed. We might lose a few trivial things, but for people like me, even public security coming here isn't much of a problem."

Though it sounded a bit boastful, making him a bit skeptical, it seemed like there must be something reliable about it if he continued to meet his partners in the same place for such risky work.

The waiter quickly brought tea. Jeong Taeui gestured to him when he was heading towards the table he was sitting at earlier and called the waiter over.

Jeong Taeui glanced at the teacup placed in front of the broker and took his own.

There was a moment of silence, and then the conversation continued with scattered topics. As expected, unless you're close, it's hard to talk comfortably without feeling any awkwardness.

Jeong Taeui slowly drank his tea and fell into thought. He wasn't one to be bothered by such things, no matter how awkward the atmosphere, but perhaps the person across from him couldn't stand the silence. The broker looked down at his watch and mumbled.

"Oh, it's almost time..."

"...Ah, then I should go..."

Jeong Taeui awkwardly put down his glass. Clearly, there was no reason for a third person to be here unless it had been agreed upon beforehand. The broker looked a bit reluctant.

However, when Jeong Taeui was about to stand up, the broker waved his hand.

"No, it's okay. I still have some time, you can finish your tea. I arrived a bit early."

"Ha, alright..."

Jeong Taeui half-stood, hesitated for a moment, then sat back down. He had planned to finish his tea and go back to his room, but then he met this broker.

"By the way... do you have anything interesting going on these days?"

Jeong Taeui habitually turned his teacup on the saucer and glanced at the broker.

For him, asking about the goods he was selling was probably taboo. So people usually chose to ask indirectly. But Jeong Taeui wasn't that curious and didn't care what the broker sold or to whom. Having witnessed large-scale arms deals, these small transactions seemed as simple as drinking a cup of tea in places like this. (So his question was genuinely just to see if there was anything interesting.)

Becoming accustomed to such transactions was already a big problem, Jeong Taeui licked his lips bitterly.

The broker seemed to have misunderstood Jeong Taeui's question. He looked surprised, as if he thought Jeong Taeui was genuinely curious about what he was selling and to whom.

The broker intertwined his fingers and responded: "It's not much."

"Well, today it's nothing significant either. Someone just asked me to make a passport."

"Passport?"

Jeong Taeui, who had been fiddling with his teacup, suddenly froze. Bitter memories flooded his mind.

Even if you have a hundred perfect passports, you can still get caught anywhere if you're unlucky. He wanted to share his hard-earned experience with the person intending to make a fake passport, but he couldn't if he didn't want to receive the broker's bullet-like glares for interfering with his business.

"..."

Jeong Taeui had no intention of creating a new identity and using the same method with Ilay. Wouldn't it be better to try escaping in a different way? Using the same methods tends to lead to the same results.

But...

"Is that passport... usable?"

Jeong Taeui pushed himself up slightly and hesitantly asked. The broker looked up confidently and said, "Of course it is!" as if he was ready to show it off immediately.

"After all, it's a fake passport, but if you just show it to someone who doesn't know you, it'll be fine..."

Jeong Taeui swallowed back his questions, reached out, and took the red passport the broker handed him.

The passport his uncle had given him before was a perfectly made fake. In fact, Jeong Taeui wasn't sharp enough to distinguish between fake documents or counterfeit money, so as long as it wasn't too obvious, he couldn't tell if the fake was of good or poor quality. So, he wasn't sure if the passport in his hand was something the broker should be proud of. But it seemed good enough, difficult for even professionals to recognize.

Jeong Taeui thought for a moment, fiddling with the passport. It was a fake identity. For someone from a small country, especially one with its own language, forging a foreign passport was very challenging.

Even for Jeong Taeui, who had traveled abroad frequently since he was young and spoke English quite well and fluently, people could still notice his accent and intonation if he spoke for long.

"In the end, this method can't be used multiple times..."

Jeong Taeui muttered and shook his head.

... But even if it's discovered, it won't be too bad.

"This thing, if it's good enough, maybe I can make one..." But before Jeong Taeui could finish his sentence.

A hand suddenly reached out from behind his shoulder. A neatly gloved navy-blue hand smoothly took the passport from Jeong Taeui's hand.

"Wang Li-Ming? If you're not fluent in the language, you should stop making fake foreign passports."

A series of pages flipping could be heard behind Jeong Taeui.

Hearing the slow and calm voice over his shoulder, Jeong Taeui froze.

"Moreover, with this thing, you wouldn't even pass the public security gate before the airport gate. If you really need it, let me introduce you to someone better. Okay, Taeil?"

"...Don't put words in my mouth. I don't 'really' need it right now. I was just curious about its price. There's nothing wrong with seeking knowledge."

Jeong Taeui emphasized the words "don't really" and turned to look at him.

He wasn't lying, but saying this in such a situation felt like a lie. See, if you're unlucky, things can turn out just like this. No matter how perfect your fake identity is, if you're unlucky, you can end up with this result immediately.

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue bitterly and looked up at the tall man who had silently come up behind him. Those navy-blue gloves didn't look remarkable, but soon they'd be wet and discarded.

Jeong Taeui just hoped he wouldn't be one of the reasons they got wet and had to be thrown away.

Even as he looked at him, Ilay, still in his unfamiliar suit, looked at the passport in his hand with an indifferent gaze, then glanced at the broker sitting opposite Jeong Taeui. The broker flinched, glanced at Jeong Taeui, and then cautiously looked at Ilay with fear.

"Who is this...?"

The broker stammered, though he seemed to recognize Ilay. However, Ilay didn't seem to care.

"Oh, this is Ilay, someone I worked with at UNHRDO... —Riegrow."

Jeong Taeui glanced at Ilay and introduced his full name. After all, he didn't usually call him by his full name, but it wasn't a secret.

"Oh, right! Mr. Riegrow of T&R. I-I met you once before..."

"Are you planning to make a fake passport for this guy?"

The broker excitedly said, but Ilay didn't bother. He calmly asked, as if talking about the weather, and casually threw the passport in front of the broker. Then he looked at Jeong Taeui, pondering.

"It's not this person, is it? The one who made the passport for you?"

"Huh? Uh, probably not."

Maybe, he added. The truth was, Jeong Taeui had never met the person who made the fake passport for him. He received it from his uncle when it was already done, so he wasn't sure if the person who made it was this broker.

"Hmm. Well, if it was someone Jeong Changin introduced to you, they wouldn't make something like this. Besides, I've been busy lately and finally have some free time, and I'm in a good mood. So today, you've saved yourself. Let's go."

Ilay's tone was extremely calm. The broker blinked blankly for a moment, seemingly not realizing those words were directed at him because Ilay spoke without looking at him.

However, even a school dog can recite poetry after three years*; Jeong Taeui, having been around Ilay for a while, understood his words and mood perfectly.

(* 서당개도 삼 년이면 풍월을 읊는다고: Proverb/ "Even a school dog can recite poetry after three years" / Even if someone has no knowledge in a particular field, if they stay in that

field long enough, they will gain knowledge and accumulate experience. - Tae has been around Ilay for a long time, so he understands those words and his mood very well.)

The broker might have known the name RieGrow, but not necessarily much about him. He opened his mouth to say something more, sensing that RieGrow might not have recognized him. RieGrow indifferently touched his glove once more.

"...— I've finished my drink!"

Jeong Taeui gulped down his tea and placed the cup back on the saucer with a clatter before standing up hastily. He moved to stand in front of Ilay RieGrow with an awkward smile and reached out to shake hands with the bewildered broker.

"The person I was waiting for has arrived, so I'll be going now. Good luck with your transaction today. See you if we have the chance."

"Huh? Oh, yes, but....."

The broker replied hesitantly, glancing at Ilay with a worried expression.

Yes. The younger brother of the "big boss" of T&R is standing right in front of you. Isn't he also famously notorious in certain fields, perhaps even more so than his brother?

Jeong Taeui could understand the feeling of wanting to talk to a famous person standing right in front of you. But damn it! The broker should know why he's so famous! Jeong Taeui's kind heart urged him to help the broker out.

Jeong Taeui smiled brightly and quietly took hold of Ilay's cold, gloved hand.

"Let's go back to the room. Anyway, I have something I want to talk to you about."

"...."

Ilay squinted at Taeui, as if understanding the thoughts running through his head. He sighed.

"Alright. I'm also curious about what you want to talk about. But right now, there's something even more bothersome to deal with, so after that's taken care of, we'll go back to the room."

Saying that, Ilay tapped the back of Jeong Taeui's hand, which was holding his. Jeong Taeui frowned and responded.

"Hey, in any case, this isn't UNHRDO. It's not within the jurisdiction. If you kill someone right in the middle of the hotel....."

"...."

As if telling him to continue talking, Ilay smirked down at Jeong Taeui. That smile was, after all, a mockery. Jeong Taeui fell silent. The smile on Ilay's face deepened.

"I know what you're thinking, Taeil. Whether what you're holding is a legitimate passport or not. I'm not cruel enough to lay a hand on brokers who deal in small transactions and sell low-quality items like that."

Jeong Taeui licked his lips and stared at Ilay. If he wanted to catch someone, he could catch as many as he liked. But in situations where he didn't restrain himself, it was terrifying for those people. The broker's face twisted like a crumpled piece of paper upon hearing that the items he dealt with were of poor quality and clumsily made. But he didn't realize that in this case, it was the very straw that saved his life. If this broker had been a professional dealing in large transactions and selling high-quality items properly, today might have marked the anniversary of his death next year.

Unlike Jeong Taeui, who had been unlucky for years, this broker was indeed a lucky person. At the same time, it seemed that the broker's client had finally arrived, so he gave a brief greeting and quickly left. The broker looked back and forth between Jeong Taeui and Ilay as if he regretted having to leave, then departed.

Jeong Taeui stood in front of Ilay until the broker and the unfamiliar middle-aged man had walked away and completely disappeared from sight. As if all his strength had left him, fatigue overwhelmed him. Jeong Taeui anxiously eyed his empty cup before looking up at Ilay, who was sitting across from him.

"....Why are you here?"

Only now did Jeong Taeui question why the man who had disappeared for a week without any contact suddenly appeared in front of him without warning. Ilay responded briefly, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Because today is Friday. Did you forget?"

Up until the day before yesterday, Jeong Taeui had been thinking about it. Yet now, he had completely forgotten. Come to think of it, didn't this man come to Hong Kong from the island every weekend for work?

Ilay called the waiter to bring drinks. His gesture of flipping through the menu looked genuinely cheerful. As he had said, it seemed his mood was really good today. When he made eye contact with the waiter, he even smiled politely.

Jeong Taeui paused, holding the glass of water that the waiter had just poured, and stared at Ilay. He blinked a few times. Ilay seemed to sense his gaze and looked back at him. Jeong Taeui awkwardly mumbled to himself: "So what?"

"Nothing. It's just that my mood is very good today."

"Hmm...?"

Ilay shrugged ambiguously.

Look, he's actually happy to see me, Jeong Taeui thought, lowering his eyes.

Jeong Taeui didn't want to make any mistakes; he would keep quiet to avoid unnecessarily provoking the man who seemed to be in a good mood after a long time. A good mood was much easier to deal with than a bad one.

Besides, this was a face he hadn't seen for a few days. If he looked annoyed, it wouldn't be pleasant at all. But if he had to point out one thing that he couldn't help but be concerned about...

"Could you—could you take off those gloves?"

"Those things look too grotesque," Jeong Taeui swallowed the last words and silently chewed on them. Ilay raised an eyebrow and obediently removed the gloves. The beautiful, white hands that he could never imagine covered by those ghastly gloves were revealed.

"Yes, I like these hands... no, that's not it, I mean, like this...—"

Those hands suddenly moved close to his face, blocking his view, and Jeong Taeui became flustered. Reflexively, he leaned back a bit and looked through the gaps between Ilay's fingers. Although he tried to suppress his instinctive wariness towards Ilay, it was already too late.

Ilay fixed his gaze on Jeong Taeui, smiling as he withdrew his hands. He leaned back comfortably on the sofa and asked,

"Alright. Let's hear what you have been waiting to tell me."

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"What?"

Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay, wondering what he was talking about. After a few seconds of silence, he remembered what he had just said to the broker: "The person I was waiting for has arrived."

"Oh, that..."

Jeong Taeui scratched his head. As if reading his thoughts, Ilay cheerfully added another jab.

"When I walked in here, I was genuinely curious about what you were going to say."

"Uh..."

Jeong Taeui weakly groaned and stared at Ilay. The truth was, he had a lot he wanted to say, but they were all difficult to bring up. Especially given the fact that he had been nearly confined for the past few days.

For example, how long he would have to stay here, or if Ilay insisted on having him followed, could he at least assign someone more professional, someone whose presence he wouldn't notice.

"Oh, alright. You know, I never actually intended to escape from surveillance."

I wasn't really trying to run away, Jeong Taeui frowned and added.

Thinking back to that made the pain in his ankle flare up again. Ilay raised an eyebrow but didn't say much, just nodded for him to continue.

"Because I was so bored, I just quietly left for a while to enjoy a walk by myself, okay? But those guys, they talked to a poor patient in poor health like me with their fists, and even used a canister of anesthetic spray to drag me away. My ankle has just started to heal a bit, do you know how much it hurts?"

Ilay kept his eyes on Jeong Taeui, listening quietly and lost in thought for a moment.

His cold eyes were a bit vague, but soon they calmed down. He spoke up.

"A poor patient with an injured ankle jumped from a several-meter-high bridge. Hearing that, I thought you were doing better."

"Well... I jumped because I knew it would be fine from that height."

"Exactly. That's what I mean."

Ilay muttered to himself. Jeong Taeui fell silent.

Ilay wasn't looking at Jeong Taeui, but he glanced at him. It seemed like Ilay was thinking about something, and then suddenly, he burst out laughing.

"That's right, you returned to the hotel calmly."

He chuckled lightly as if genuinely amused. Just then, a waiter approached, placed a teacup on the table, and left. Steam rose from the hot tea.

Jeong Taeui frowned slightly, looking at Ilay suspiciously, trying to figure out why the man before him was suddenly laughing so joyfully.

After a while, Ilay stopped laughing, but the smile in his eyes remained.

"This time, I have to admit, your escape skills are quite impressive."

"Huh?"

"I mean, from the moment you jumped off the bridge, the events that followed were beyond my control."

Jeong Taeui stared intently at Ilay. He sighed contentedly, then put on the gloves he had previously forgotten about. Watching Ilay's unusual behavior, Jeong Taeui tilted his head in confusion.

"Why are you putting those on all of a sudden?"

"There's something that's been bothering me, and now I know what it is. Wait here. I'll be back before the tea gets cold."

"What... —"

Before Jeong Taeui could finish his sentence, Ilay stood up from his seat and started striding briskly towards somewhere ahead.

The rest of Jeong Taeui's words hung in the air as he watched Ilay's figure gradually recede.

At that moment, across the lobby, a man who had been reading a newspaper on a sofa near a small tea table suddenly stood up and started running towards the other end of the hotel, trying to maintain a considerable distance from Ilay.

Ilay smirked and quickened his pace. His figure quickly disappeared from Jeong Taeui's sight.

Jeong Taeui was suddenly left alone, not understanding what was happening. He blinked, staring blankly at the empty space before him.

"Huh...?"

Jeong Taeui tilted his head and scratched the back of his neck. Suddenly, he had a bad premonition, like a sign that something extremely horrifying was about to happen.

Jeong Taeui glared at the steaming teacup in front of him. Wouldn't it be better to return to his room now? Even if he had to witness something unpleasant, facing it in private rather than in public would be significantly different.

Of course, there were times when being in a crowded place felt safer – like when facing Ilay's potential killing spree – but this time was different.

Jeong Taeui looked at the steaming hot tea in front of him and glanced towards where Ilay had disappeared. There was no sign of him returning immediately. The distance was considerable. Even if Ilay moved at maximum speed, it would be difficult to catch up easily (even though Ilay was fast, catching up with the person who had just fled wouldn't be easy). Even if he shot the guy in the leg, it would still be difficult to drag him back...

Jeong Taeui thought about it and shook his head. It was indeed best to hide in his room. Seeing Ilay walk away with those gloves was truly terrifying.

Jeong Taeui didn't want to advertise to others that Ilay was a killer, nor did he intend to let others know he was involved in this mess. Anyway, Ilay knew his room, so if he didn't find him here, he would go there.

"This is the bill... —"

When he called a passing waiter, the waiter pointed to the bill with a friendly smile. As soon as Jeong Taeui heard that, he tried to leave his seat quickly but failed. Because just before he could move a few steps away, several short screams, murmurs, and a cold silence came from the other side of the hotel in quick succession.

The waiter standing beside him also stared at him blankly, while Jeong Taeui frowned at the wide-eyed waiter looking over his shoulder. His instincts told him he was already one step too late.

Jeong Taeui didn't want to look back. He pretended nothing was happening, wanting to settle the bill quickly and return to his room. But seeing the bewildered and frightened faces of the people around him, Jeong Taeui could only sigh and lower his head. Finally, someone approached and silently stopped a few steps behind him. Even though he didn't want to, Jeong Taeui heard a voice calling him.

"Is the tea already cold? Impossible."

Ilay's voice was calm and casual, as if nothing had happened. He skeptically picked up the teacup, and the clink of the cup against the saucer rang out in the oppressively silent room.

"Indeed, it hasn't cooled down. I told you to wait for me, Taeil."

"..."

Jeong Taeui cursed inwardly, "Are you a prophet or something?" and slowly, reluctantly turned around with a wary expression.

The scene before him was predictable, though not what he hoped for. The images unfolding before his eyes were all too familiar. Ilay casually threw "something" onto an empty chair, and that "something"—presumably a person—landed with a thud. The person looked as tattered as a soaked cotton ball. More accurately, they seemed like a blood-soaked cotton ball.

The person's face was a bloody mess, barely recognizable as human. If Ilay had used his fists on someone, it wouldn't end with just their face being smashed. Surely, their arms would be broken, and their legs would have met a similar fate.

Even without witnessing it directly, the images flashed through Jeong Taeui's mind. He could picture Ilay making that man run in fear, then breaking his leg in an instant. Afterward, Ilay would leave the man unable to move and drag him across the ground.

At that moment, the distance between them was considerable, and the man had bolted as soon as he sensed danger. Yet, Ilay still managed to catch up with him on that street and bring him back here so quickly. In any way you think about it, this man wasn't human.

Ilay RieGrow couldn't be human.

Jeong Taeui quickly decided that the next time he saw Kyle, he would seriously ask if T&R's research center was really studying weapons.

Ilay removed his blood-soaked gloves and threw them on the man, then sat down. He leisurely picked up the steaming cup of tea and licked his lips.

Jeong Taeui stood frozen, staring at Ilay. He couldn't restrain himself and wanted to leave immediately. Ilay nonchalantly met his gaze.

"Didn't you say your leg was uncomfortable? Then why are you standing there?"

"... I don't want to sit on a chair with someone who's fighting for their life every second."

Jeong Taeui muttered to himself. Blood was dripping from the man onto the chair in a steady stream.

"Haha." Ilay laughed out loud.

"No, it looks like it's just a minor head wound bleeding a bit too much, not that serious. I'll take this guy to the hospital and make sure his life isn't in danger. But before that, let's ask him a question."

Jeong Taeui knew the smart way to get out of this situation, so he clicked his tongue and approached the table, then sat down angrily.

"If you have something to ask, ask it quickly. I want to go back to my room."

Feeling the stares from the people around, Jeong Taeui worriedly looked at the man to see if he could still speak. It seemed only a matter of time before the police would arrive.

However, the person in front of him was very calm. Ilay glanced back and signaled to a man standing near a column in the distance. The man nodded and made a call.

Jeong Taeui quickly realized that was one of the tails that had been following him these past few days. A thought flashed in his mind, and he turned to look at the bloodied man next to him.

Looking closer, it took him a moment to recognize the man because his face was so battered and deformed, but he was indeed the one who had chased him the other day and pulled out the anesthetic spray on him.

"Um..."

Jeong Taeui murmured, nodding, while Ilay calmly sat in front of him, drinking tea.

"This is the guy who's been following you, right? Where did you go with such a tail?"

"Isn't he yours?"

In response to Jeong Taeui's question, Ilay pointed to the man standing near the column instead of answering directly. Jeong Taeui turned back to look suspiciously at the bloodied man next to him.

"So, what's this guy's deal?"

"Alright. Let's start with that question. It won't take long, just ask, and then we'll head back to the room."

Ilay set down his tea and turned his gaze to the man lying limply as if unconscious on the chair.

"Who sent you to follow him?"

There was no response. Perhaps the man wasn't even aware that he was losing consciousness. Jeong Taeui worriedly muttered.

"Is he fainting? No way...—"

"He's not dead, and he's not fainting. Right after catching him, I broke his leg. I gave this thing some drugs – stuff not sold on the market due to some ingredient issues, but its effects are pretty good, at least enough to keep him from sleeping for a while... though surgery will be difficult, I haven't thought about that."

"The doctors will have to work very hard to piece together his broken bones while he's fully conscious. Sorry."

Jeong Taeui watched Ilay, who spoke nonchalantly without batting an eye, and his face turned pale.

He couldn't even think straight.

The man seemed still conscious, trembling and shaking his head. Ilay smiled without any emotion.

Jeong Taeui bit his pale lips and fell silent. This wasn't someone else's business; it was directly related to him.

Jeong Taeui felt a shiver run down his spine as he wondered why he had done this, knowing Ilay was someone who could tear people apart. Meanwhile, Ilay patted the man's shoulder and leisurely spoke.

"Who's behind you? Who exactly ordered you to seize every opportunity to grab him by any means?"

"..."

"Really. The world is full of fools."

Ilay clicked his tongue after staring at the man, who remained silent for a moment. He concluded his "speech."

Amidst the murmurs of the tense conversation, a man let out a terrifying scream, and those witnessing the scene couldn't help but emit small cries from their throats.

A few people, seemingly hotel staff, started to approach.

Ilay didn't bother glancing at them. He grabbed the bent hand of the man and slapped it hard against his face.

"Once again. If you don't answer this time, your next destination won't be a hospital. Let's go back to the room, and we'll slowly talk and find out how many bones and internal organs a human body has. Okay?"

The low voice with a calm smile whispered into Jeong Taeui's ear.

Jeong Taeui bit his lip repeatedly, looking at the complex expressions on that face.

It felt like he had made a mistake by questioning why he was being monitored. If he hadn't run off without saying anything, maybe this situation wouldn't have happened. But how could he have known it was this guy and not someone else? On the other hand, he felt that if it wasn't this guy, there would be some other crazy person in the world who would unhesitatingly order someone to monitor someone else.

"Hey, Ilay, what if this guy was trying to catch someone..."

What if there was a misunderstanding and they caught the wrong person? Jeong Taeui said confusedly, but in response, he received a cold gaze filled with mocking laughter.

Ilay gently squeezed the man's chin without answering Taeui's questions. Even though he did it very gently, Jeong Taeui knew how strong those delicate, beautiful hands were. He silently averted his eyes from the man's distorted face.

"Then I'll ask one more time. Who gave the order?"

Ilay's voice was low. His tone and expression were very calm, not showing any anger. If someone only looked at him, they might think he was very gentle, but that was if he wasn't holding a bloody man right in front of him. Many people must have been deceived by that face, but luckily, Jeong Taeui wasn't one of them.

The man's lips trembled, turning pale as he looked at Ilay, who remained calm even in this situation. The man's tongue was numb to the point of being unable to speak.

Ilay didn't give the man much time. The man blinked once or twice.

Just as Ilay stood up from the chair, a man in a neat, clean uniform—like the hotel manager—rushed to his side. Following him were three or four burly men.

"I'm sorry, sir, but please wait..."

"Phone——"

Ilay cut him off before he could finish. He spoke politely, and the man fell silent and nodded at his words.

"You should have received a call. Haven't you been notified yet? Then let me tell you. Since this is just 'a small argument between friends' there's nothing for you to worry or be concerned about. I need to make amends with my friend, so please arrange a room for me."

Ilay paused and glanced at Jeong Taeui.

"You don't want your room to smell like blood, do you?"

"Of course not..."

Jeong Taeui replied, speechless. He knew exactly what would happen in that room and had no intention of giving up his room for it.

The man in uniform seemed to hesitate for a moment in the face of Ilay's calm demeanor, but eventually, he straightened up, faint wrinkles appearing between his eyebrows. He must have been sharp enough to recognize troublemakers in the hotel.

"I'm sorry, sir. But according to the hotel's policy, I'm afraid I can't comply with your request. Moreover, causing a disturbance in a public area..."

The man in uniform spoke in a high-pitched voice as if reading from a Korean book, and the burly men following him flanked Ilay on both sides, surrounding him.

Although this situation seemed intimidating, Ilay didn't even glance at them. He simply smirked as if annoyed.

"Taeil. Do you have an extra pair of gloves?"

Ilay suddenly asked. Hearing those words, Jeong Taeui massaged his temples, feeling a headache.

"No... I'm not your lieutenant anymore. Why would I carry an extra pair of gloves?"

(Suppose the spy sprints to escape from Ilay, maintaining a distance of 20 - 30 meters (an optimal distance for a professional spy to easily escape), and returns before Taeui can grasp the situation while the tea is still hot, so the elapsed time is around 4-8 minutes. From this, we can infer that Ilay's speed must be over 30 km/h, and he returns in a completely normal state => Not human.)

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It seemed that today this man would not stop at capturing just one person. Even as the police were rushing over, Jeong Taeui wondered how many more people he intended to catch.

Jeong Taeui felt a bit unsettled under the cold gazes of the others, including the man in uniform, and felt really uncomfortable. He sincerely wanted to justify that he had nothing to do with this crazy person.

The sound of sirens grew closer, Jeong Taeui couldn't tell if it was the police or an ambulance.

The bloodied face of the man lying limp in front of Ilay showed a glimmer of life. Perhaps he saw a glimmer of hope for survival, but before it could even fully bloom, it shattered instantly.

The man on the phone said - "Yes, this is Robbie. There's a bit of a commotion here. I'll handle it soon and get back to you." - The man in uniform paused, looking at Ilay with a strange expression.

"Yes, yes," the man's face showed clear disappointment as he responded on the phone. Anxiety was evident in his hasty movements as he glanced at Ilay.

"Can I go back to my room now?"

Jeong Taeui quietly asked, knowing he wouldn't get an answer. He had grown accustomed to the stares since becoming Ilay's second-lieutenant at UNHDRO, but the cold gazes from ordinary people were much harder to bear.

"It will be over soon. Breaking each bone doesn't take too long. —Liu. If it's the police, let them in, if it's an ambulance, tell them to wait. I'll go to the room for a bit and then come back."

Jeong Taeui didn't know who Ilay was talking to as he stared into the void. The person who responded was a man sitting on a sofa across the lobby. Jeong Taeui recognized him as one of the tails that had been following him for days. The man gave a brief reply and left.

The man in uniform spoke reluctantly as he gestured for the burly men surrounding Ilay to step back with a look of frustration.

"I'll prepare a room for you... So you can talk with your friend. Also, if possible, we need to maintain the hotel's image, so please..."

Despite his unwilling tone, his face was adorned with a commercial smile, full of respect for Ilay. Jeong Taeui thought this old man was also quite frightening and patted his heart, which had been working overtime.

A waiter ran over from the lobby, and Ilay nodded slightly as he received the key from him. He became pensive and glanced back at the bloodied man.

"Let's go. Let's go upstairs and have a calm conversation, my friend." *<Let's count...>*

Ilay grabbed the man's collar and lifted him effortlessly, smiling warmly. The man clung to Ilay's hand and stumbled along, dragging his broken leg. His mouth, hands, and legs trembled uncontrollably as he took shaky steps. He whimpered like a dying animal, blood spilling from his loosened teeth.

"Li... —"

The man mumbled something desperately. Each time he opened his mouth, blood gushed out, making it hard to understand. Ilay smirked and lightly slapped his cheek—a "light" slap that sounded like tearing flesh.

"I can't understand you."

Ilay said curtly. This time, the man struggled to form coherent words.

"Ling....Xin.....i"

The fragmented, slow words came out unclearly, but they were audible. That was all he could manage.

Jeong Taeui stared blankly at the man and blinked.

"Ling Xin....? Who is that?"

Jeong Taeui scratched his head and mumbled. It was a name he had never heard before.

Ilay had said that this wasn't someone he had sent, so Taeui wondered if it was someone related to his uncle or his brother.

Jeong Taeui fell into deep thought, considering whether to ask his uncle directly. In front of him, the man stuttered weakly and exhaustedly.

"Ling... that guy... bring him... bring him to....."

".....?"

The man's bloodied hand pointed at Jeong Taeui. Reflexively, Jeong Taeui took a step back, watching the bloodstained hand reach toward him.

"Me? No, well, of course, it's me. You've been chasing me. But who is that person?"

Jeong Taeui curiously tilted his head, wondering if the man was trying to find his missing brother. Then, he suddenly caught Ilay's gaze.

Ilay was smiling. The corners of his mouth lifted slightly, revealing a slender curve.

Jeong Taeui realized that Ilay might have known the answer even before the man spoke.

"Il..."

But before Jeong Taeui could call out Ilay's name, Ilay spoke first, "I understand," and delivered a heavy slap to the man's other cheek. Blood and screams burst forth simultaneously.

"You should have answered sooner. There's someone here eager to get back to his room. —
—Chie. Take this man away."

Ilay spoke loudly without looking back. A man who had been observing from behind a column stepped forward.

Now, it would be hard for even family members to recognize the man with his battered face.

In the oppressive silence and distant conversations, Ilay remained calm – no, with a slightly displeased expression, he wiped the blood off his hands.

Suddenly, a few steps away, he walked towards the man in uniform who stood frozen like a frog before a snake and pulled out a white handkerchief neatly folded in the man's breast pocket. The silk handkerchief gilded slowly over Ilay's hand, quickly soaking up the dark red blood.

"Can I cancel the room?"

Ilay smiled, placing the bloodstained handkerchief back into the man's pocket, then turned his back to him. He headed towards Taeui, who stood in the void, looking weary.

"Now that I have a rough idea of what's been bothering me, let's go to the room."

"...."

Jeong Taeui really didn't want to reinforce everyone's perception that "these two know each other" by leaving with this man, but since he had made it clear, it was best to leave immediately.

Jeong Taeui nodded unconsciously and quickly turned to head towards the elevator. As he did, he caught the gaze of the broker sitting a few tables away. The broker stared at Ilay with a bewildered expression, realizing just how lucky he had been.

He was indeed very fortunate. See, after disappearing before Ilay, he would never have to face him again. But what about Taeui? He didn't even know how long he would have to stay in this hotel.

Jeong Taeui intentionally left the lobby and walked along the corridor leading to the new building before entering the elevator. The countless gazes behind him had vanished, but the smell of blood seemed to linger at the tip of his nose.

"Anyway, there was an elevator there, so I wonder if it was necessary to go this far?"

A casual voice followed Jeong Taeui, a few steps behind. Standing in the empty elevator lobby, Jeong Taeui pressed the button for the 10th floor, turned to look at Ilay, and sighed.

"All right. So ——who is that?"

"Who?"

"The one behind that guy?"

Jeong Taeui frowned and asked again.

There was no way this man wouldn't know. If he didn't know, he obviously wouldn't let that man go. (No, even now, it can't be certain that he let the man go.)

The person is called Ling Tao. And what else did he say? His master told him to bring him back.

He couldn't say he understood it exactly. The bloodied tongue and damaged mouth prevented the man from speaking clearly. But that was all Jeong Taeui heard.

But...

"I don't know anyone like that."

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue and mumbled, tilting his head. In response to Jeong Taeui, Ilay, who had been staring at him, suddenly laughed.

"Speaking of the Ling family, the whole world knows them. Currently, the head of the family is a seventy-year-old man named Ling Ho Long. Despite his age, he's still shrewd and wields his power everywhere, but he's notoriously authoritarian and greedy. Haven't you heard of him?"

"Never."

"Really? Well, did you know that when he was around fifty, he fell in love with a young girl, not even twenty at the time, and took her as his seventh wife, doting on her? It's a very famous story."

Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay with a strange expression as he continued the unexpected story. It seemed like a weird story that could only appear in women's magazines or from over 20 years ago. Jeong Taeui pondered for a moment to find the connection between this story and the prestigious person who ordered the man to capture him.

"I hope you're not saying that the seventh wife is related to my brother."

Of course, this could never happen with his brother Jaeui, a genius with no talent for flirting with women.

If he had decided to flirt with someone, Jeong Taeui might not have known, but as far as he understood his brother, Jeong Jaeui had no interest in such matters. Especially with a married

woman. Furthermore, she would be ten years older than him.

Jeong Taeui imagined it for a moment and immediately shook his head. Ilay laughed down at him, as if not expecting such thoughts from him.

"Ahaaha, Jeong Jaeui and that woman? No relation at all. That woman poured all her attention and soul into the son she bore. Her youngest son declared that it didn't matter if Ling Ho Long didn't care about him. The neglect was so intense that even her own family criticized her."

"...----"

Jeong Taeui stared at Ilay. Suddenly, something seemed stuck in his throat. And then, the weak suspicion that had gnawed at his mind made his heart feel suffocated.

"That, that son..."

Jeong Taeui mumbled. At the same moment, the elevator stopped and opened. Under the light shining from the elevator, Ilay looked at Jeong Taeui. His eyes narrowed into a slender line, staring intently at Jeong Taeui's face as if to devour every nook and cranny.

"It seems you forgot the full name of that kid, didn't you? That brat would cry from being ignored. No, it's from anger, right?"

"Ling... Xinlu..."

Jeong Taeui muttered in a daze. In reality, his mind felt as if half of it had flown away.

"Moreover, he has a very good background. He is the son of a famous business family in China; just hearing the name makes you know his stature is significant."

"Indeed, his family is greedy. But I didn't expect them to go to such lengths to get Gil Sang Cheon."

"Originally, he is the son of a wealthy family with a long history, so he would handle things by establishing a company of his own in his hometown."

The brief, scattered words from his uncle, Morer, and Ilay floated through Taeui's mind. Shinru. Ling Shinru. That lovely and adorable child. He had forgotten about him. Since he met Ilay again, he had completely forgotten about that person.

Jeong Taeui stared at Ilay in shock. His mind became muddled. How could he forget that kid? He hadn't even thought about him once. How could he completely forget that adorable child?

"....!"

Jeong Taeui turned and frantically walked back the way he had come. He hadn't seen Shinru in a long time. Since Jeong Taeui left the island, he had heard that Xinlu had immediately left UNHRDO as well. After that, all contact was lost.

Does he resent him? Did Xinlu feel resentment because Jeong Taeui left without a word, and that's why he ordered the man to capture him? If that was the case, all the man had to do was tell him that Xinlu was looking for him, and Jeong Taeui would have willingly followed without resistance.

But as he hurried back to the lobby, a strong hand grabbed him from behind, stopping him. Jeong Taeui halted, feeling the beautiful hands tightly gripping his shoulders. He turned to look back anxiously, and Ilay held him with a cold expression.

"The man has been transferred to a hospital or somewhere else. And even if he was still there, he wouldn't have the capability to bring you to Ling Xinlu."

"Where is that place?"

Jeong Taeui immediately asked but received no reply. Instead, he got a cold gaze from Ilay. After a moment, Ilay's voice sounded slowly.

"Do you plan to go?"

"..."

Jeong Taeui didn't answer. Gradually, under those cold eyes, he remembered his reality. The fleeting emotions that had occupied his mind began to subside.

If he went, he would see Xinlu again. Would anything change? It seemed not. Xinlu would still be the Xinlu that Jeong Taeui knew, and Jeong Taeui would still be himself. Nothing would change.

But it felt like there was something he wanted to say, something he hadn't yet said. Thinking about it, Jeong Taeui faced Ilay in silence. Suddenly, Ilay spoke in a deep voice.

"I really.... I can't stay calm when I hear that name. Jeong Taeil, do I need to tell you this? I assure you that if you go to that house now, you will never come out again. Before you become a corpse."

The hand on Jeong Taeui's shoulder seemed to loosen a bit, then the fingers gently touched his shoulder. It was like trying to advise a disobedient child.

"I have to see him."

I have to see him once. I need to say something. Even if decades pass, human relationships will remain the same. If I don't make a decisive move now, this vague situation will continue forever.

Suddenly, the hand resting on Jeong Taeui's shoulder froze. Ilay's gaze also settled on him.

"Alright...."

Ilay released Jeong Taeui's shoulder. Jeong Taeui exhaled a slight sigh and stepped back a bit. "I give up," Ilay shrugged slightly as he spoke.

"I've been a bit busy these days, and it seems my mind has been wandering. I've been talking about useless things."

"Tsk"- Ilay clicked his tongue, his expression darkening with a chilling coldness, and spoke.

"I'll just give you the conclusion."

"You can't go."

"*You can't go*" - those seemed to be the last words Jeong Taeui comprehended. It seemed Ilay said a few more things afterward, but Jeong Taeui couldn't understand any of them. Only a few seconds after the pain hit, did he realize Ilay's fist had sunk deep into his stomach.

"...----."

Jeong Taeui couldn't utter a word. The urge to vomit surged from within. Ilay gently supported him with one arm as Jeong Taeui instinctively bit his lip and collapsed on the spot.

His vision darkened. His back was drenched in cold sweat, and his ears rang. It felt as if his internal organs had shattered into pieces. If he lost consciousness like this, he might die immediately and never see the light again. In a semi-conscious state, Jeong Taeui stared at the ground, seemingly shaking before him. He couldn't move even a finger as Ilay carried him back to the elevator.

It hurt terribly.

No, it hurt so much that he could barely feel the pain anymore. His senses seemed numb. Perhaps this was what approaching death felt like.

Only when he sensed the elevator moving to his floor did Jeong Taeui manage to lick his lips and speak.


"Bastard... it's really ineffective..."

It felt almost funny to say this after being hit, but that was the first thought that crossed his mind. Jeong Taeui would rather die instantly from a shot than endure the excruciating pain of wanting to faint but not being able to.

He let his body go limp and let himself hang down. It hurt even more than running with a bruised ankle. If he could just faint, it would be so much easier, but he couldn't.

As he hung over Ilay's shoulder, swaying with each movement, Jeong Taeui lamented,

"You're a monster. A monster..."

<I like the way he displays his power in this chapter. A single phone call, and both the head of the hotel and the police in Hong Kong have to comply immediately. > 

Vol 5 - Chapter 10: I'm so foolish (18+)

As soon as Jeong Taeui managed to collect himself and realize that Ilay had stopped moving around, he found himself right in front of his room door.

Ilay reached over to the hand wrapped around Jeong Taeui's throbbing stomach, rummaged through his pocket, took out the key card, and opened the door to step inside.

Jeong Taeui pressed one hand against his aching stomach with each step and followed him. Then, he collapsed onto the bed.

Ilay walked over to the window, took off his jacket, and placed it on a nearby chair. He removed his tie and draped it over the jacket. Finally, he passed by Jeong Taeui, bent down, and took out a can of beer from the minibar.

"...."

It wasn't so bad when he was lying still, but as soon as he tried to move, his stomach hurt again. Jeong Taeui decided to sit quietly for a while.

In the meantime, Ilay hadn't said anything unusual. While he often didn't speak much, sometimes he would say a thing or two. Why was he now lost in thought and keeping silent?

Jeong Taeui glanced around and slowly raised his head. He rubbed his stomach. Damn bastard, he had been punched quite hard. But considering his current situation, Jeong Taeui tried to restrain himself.

Jeong Taeui looked out the window with a can of beer in his hand and glared fiercely at Ilay, who was still looking out. Even then, he had to remind himself to stay alert and keep an eye on Ilay, just in case he suddenly turned around.

Suddenly, Ilay downed the can of beer, placed it next to the window, and kicked the chair beside him.

****Crash****

With a barbaric sound, the large chair flew through the air and slammed into the table. The mirror mounted on the wall behind the table shattered into pieces.

Jeong Taeui rubbed his stomach on the bed, his eyes wide with astonishment.

Ilay's expression as he turned his back to the window was not much different from usual. His face was still indifferent and calm. He had just smashed the mirror and then walked over to the fallen chair and kicked its frame. The thick, rough wooden frame broke easily like a rotten branch.

Clink clink The sound of glass fragments falling and hitting each other could be heard. Jeong Taeui raised an eyebrow.

He had seen Ilay's unusual temper many times before. No, Ilay was already unusual on a daily basis. Hadn't he just beaten someone like a butcher earlier?

However, Jeong Taeui had never seen him destroy objects and use them as weapons without a specific reason – like breaking a chair leg to attack someone or retaliating against someone who had attacked him – he had never witnessed that.

If he could vent his anger by smashing objects, it would be more humane. But Ilay didn't seem much like a human. If he got angry, he would take the life of the cause of his anger immediately.

"..."

He had seemed quite happy earlier, but why was he suddenly smashing things like this?

Ilay's expression was as usual, but his demeanor was strange. Jeong Taeui raised his voice irritably while glaring at Ilay and sighed.

"Why are you venting your anger on objects like this? It doesn't suit you at all."

Only after blurting out those words did Jeong Taeui feel regret for saying them. If not listened to carefully, they could be misunderstood.

"No, I didn't mean you should vent your anger on me." - He quickly added.

But on the other hand, what did Ilay have to be angry about? It wasn't like Jeong Taeui had immediately run off to find Xinlu. Actually, Ilay didn't even need to use his fists; even if he had only used words, Jeong Taeui wouldn't have had the confidence to defy him and would have done as he said.

Jeong Taeui thought the reason Ilay suddenly became irritated was because he had said he needed to see Xinlu. That meant Ilay didn't like the idea of him meeting Xinlu.

If that's the case, could it be because Ilay liked Xinlu....—? <...>

Jeong Taeui stared blankly into the void in front of him, lost in his thoughts, and finally arrived at a simple conclusion. But just as he thought of that hypothesis, he immediately shook his head vigorously.

No, impossible. There's no way. He wasn't the type to have those kinds of human emotions. Moreover, it was the deepest of all human emotions.

If that were true, there must be some reason why Jeong Taeui shouldn't meet Xinlu. What could it be if not that...

"....ah."

Jeong Taeui, after pondering for a while, arrived at the simplest and most understandable conclusion.

Perhaps Ilay didn't like what he had said and was annoyed when he tried to go back to the lobby while Ilay wanted to go to the room. Yes, thinking like that, it seemed there was no problem. "That weird temper of yours." - Jeong Taeui muttered inwardly.

Standing on the shattered glass pieces and looking down at Jeong Taeui, Ilay suddenly spoke.

"Doesn't suit me...? Haha, does this not suit me? Then, how should I do it to suit me?"

He spoke softly, as if smiling, and slowly approached. One step, two steps, gradually advancing toward the bed where Jeong Taeui was sitting. Jeong Taeui silently clicked his tongue. Damn. It felt like he was digging his own grave.

"Great. I want to ask you something. I don't even know what's suitable for me these days. Recently, it's been quite a mess. Until now, I've never been like this. But lately, what this place wants...."

His fingertip traced down his chest, to the left, right over his heart.

"What this place wants... .. It's very strange."

Ilay's hand lingered over his chest for a moment. His smile was filled with confusion. It seemed like something really difficult for him. That subtle smile disappeared as he stopped right in front of Jeong Taeui. And with an expressionless, indifferent face like a lifeless doll, he quietly looked down at Jeong Taeui.

"Taeil. Sometimes you do very stupid things, but you're quite smart. So let me ask you something. Advice from reason or advice from the heart. Which one is correct?"

Ilay's face came right up to his. He leaned down, whispering softly into Jeong Taeui's ear and gently brushed against the back of his neck. The hand that had been covered in blood was now smooth.

Jeong Taeui frowned at him.

He couldn't pinpoint exactly what this man was referring to. But an alarm rang inside him that this could be a very dangerous matter. He just didn't know in which direction it would go.

Jeong Taeui's mind raced as he faced Ilay's gaze still fixed on him, just a hand's width away.

"When you dealt with that guy. Specifically—Yes. When you took down that guy earlier."

"Hm....?"

As Jeong Taeui seriously presented his thoughts, Ilay raised an eyebrow at him, and Jeong Taeui nodded as if to continue.

"At that time, which advice did you follow? Reason or the heart?"

As he spoke, he thought that whether Ilay took down a person and turned them into a bloodied mess according to reason or the heart, it wouldn't make any difference. Killing someone by reason or the heart didn't matter. What mattered was that he had killed someone.

So, regardless of how Ilay answered, Jeong Taeui would still have to think about what to say next.

But Jeong Taeui didn't need to worry too much.

"My reason and heart don't conflict much. They get along quite well. Whether it's stabbing someone's throat with a knife or tearing out their heart. Neither objects."

In response to Ilay's words, Jeong Taeui fell silent.

Ilay knew everything, except for regret.

Why did his life have to end up with someone like this....

Jeong Taeui scratched his head. He didn't care much whether he followed the path of reason or heart, as long as he didn't regret making someone live in agony. That's why Jeong Taeui could only sigh inwardly - "Following either one is fine. After all, for you, they are the same."

He frowned and thought again. Even if he gave Ilay a specific answer, it wouldn't be of much help to this man named Ilay. But under normal circumstances, it was quite fitting.

"Listening to your reason would be better, your reason. If you act according to reason instead of emotion, you'll regret it less later on."

Anyway, it was pointless when his mood was bad. But Jeong Taeui concluded based on his own experience.

Ilay quietly looked down at Taeui and slowly spoke.

"Reason, huh. Acting on reason is better than acting on emotion...?"

"Hmmm. I think that's better."

In interpersonal relationships, there were often serious issues, but this man named Ilay Riegrow was smart and scary enough to make Jeong Taeui fear him at all times. He was entirely different from Jeong Taeui. The most frightening thing about him was his ability to see through others' thoughts or predict what they would do based on their behavior. So, acting according to reason seemed like it would prevent him from regretting when looking back.

"Like reason...Huh" - he murmured as if speaking to himself, looking at Jeong Taeui with an unreadable expression. Suddenly, his hand slid down, brushing past Taeui's cheek and moving to the back of his neck. That hand wrapped around Jeong Taeui's neck, the thumb gently pressing on his throat.

Jeong Taeui's expression froze. Suddenly, he remembered a video he had seen before. A pale hand grabbing someone's neck, those beautiful fingers tearing through the skin, stabbing through the muscles, and piercing the throat.

Now, if this man decided to do that again, he could take Jeong Taeui's life instantly.

Their eyes met. Jeong Taeui couldn't even move, just stared at Ilay. He met Jeong Taeui's gaze without blinking, knowing that his life was under one of Ilay's fingers.

The pressure on his throat increased gradually. Jeong Taeui's hand clenched the bed sheet. The finger pressing against his throat slowly dug into his skin, making it hard to breathe. Jeong Taeui grimaced in pain and struggled for air.

Ilay didn't take his eyes off him, watching as Jeong Taeui's breathing stopped. Then, he abruptly let go, as if nothing had happened. For a moment, Ilay looked at his hand with a strange expression. Perhaps it was a hint of unease.

Jeong Taeui clutched his throat, coughing reflexively. He looked up at Ilay while rubbing his aching neck. Ilay observed him closely from start to finish.

"If I follow my reason."

Ilay spoke. Jeong Taeui once again noticed the delicate and beautiful hands capable of killing anyone at any moment, slowly unbuttoning his shirt. He spoke and then fell silent. After a while, he continued, unbuttoning the last button and tossing the shirt aside.

"Taeil, you would have died several times by now."

"Your reason tells you to kill me?"

More than that, it was casual but still bloody. Jeong Taeui rubbed his neck and grumbled angrily.

"Let's see. At least I don't think I'd let the one who tied me up and drugged me live."

Ilay looked at Jeong Taeui for a moment, then let out a quiet laugh. The kind that didn't quite reach his eyes but conveyed an unsettling sense of amusement.

"True. But here you are, still alive and talking."

Jeong Taeui could only sigh deeply. This was the reality he was stuck in, one where he constantly had to navigate the precarious and deadly whims of Ilay Riegrow.

"...."

If it was said like that, then I am guilty, and there's nothing left to argue.

Jeong Taeui licked his lips bitterly and averted his gaze. However, his eyes landed on Ilay's hand, which was leisurely undoing the belt buckle.

"Ilay, why are you undressing...?"

"Jeong Taeil, you've seen me and him before."

Ilay cut off Jeong Taeui's suspicious look. He shut his mouth immediately.

He wasn't foolish enough to ask who Ilay was talking about. As soon as he heard those words, Taeui reflexively recalled the images of Ilay and Xinlu before, the two of them entangled like beasts on the bed. Simultaneously, he also instantly remembered the long-gone feelings of confusion and discomfort he had felt at that time.

"...What about it?"

"Just a thought that came to my mind."

"I'm really stupid."

Ilay said vaguely.

Click

The belt was loosened with a rustling sound, and the metallic clinking was vivid in the suffocating atmosphere.

"Do you regret doing that with Xinlu...?"

Jeong Taeui suddenly wanted to give this man a merciless blow. If he could, it would bring him such relief.

At that time, knowing well that Jeong Taeui had feelings for Shinru, he still slept with him just for a deal. Even knowing that Jeong Taeui was directly witnessing it, he did it as if Taeui was right in front of him. But now he said such things?

... If he could beat this man now, it would be because he listened to reason.

Jeong Taeui slowly unclenched his fists, revealing the discomfort on his face. Meanwhile, Ilay had taken off his pants.

Now, the only thing hanging on him was a pair of underwear. At least, it clearly showed the shape of the huge thing inside, so the underwear did not serve its intended function.

"Wrong. That's not it. What I think is stupid is that things should have happened differently."

Saying so, Ilay approached Jeong Taeui. He threw his clothes not far away and quietly moved closer. As soon as his back felt a slight push against the headboard, Jeong Taeui immediately regretted it. He shouldn't have sat here and given him the chance to climb onto the bed like this.

"HEY, WAIT A MINUTE, THAT..."

Before Jeong Taeui could hastily say anything, Ilay was already on the bed, pulling down his pants.

"I should have shown him what I was doing to you, instead of letting you see what I was doing to him."

".....!!!!!"

The skin below his waist was exposed, rubbing directly against the sheets and bedspread. But more than the cold feeling of being naked, Ilay's low whisper in his ear sent shivers down Jeong Taeui's spine.

"If I had done that, I would feel more at ease now, that's what I mean."

"At ease with what... no, wait a minute, now...."

"Stop thinking about that kid. Forget him. There's no reason or need for you to meet him. So stop thinking about him."

The pants, not fully removed, still wrapped around his ankles and hindered Jeong Taeui's movements. His shirt was also being taken off one piece at a time, the touches and ticklish sounds in his ear making his insides feel like they were about to burst into flames.

Indeed, as Ilay said. At this moment, even if he wanted to think about Xinlu, he couldn't help but be distracted. The cool air brushed over his exposed skin every time Ilay easily removed his clothes while he struggled, making the thread of reason in him feel like it was about to snap.

"Ilay, wait, what are you doing, we were just talking normally, why suddenly... Damn it! Why are you suddenly acting like this, you bastard!"

Feeling utterly humiliated, Jeong Taeui tried to push Ilay away, wanting to cry as even the last piece of underwear on him was effortlessly pulled off. The massive thing from Ilay's underwear touched his thigh.

Vol 5 - Chapter 11: Taeil, hug me (18+)

Right now, Taeui was in no mood to do that with Ilay.

Jeong Taeui talked about Xinlu partly because his mood had sunk, partly because he felt exhausted, and partly because Ilay had just talked about things he couldn't fully comprehend.

However, no matter what Jeong Taeui thought, things continued. Even if he cursed a hundred times, Ilay wouldn't blink. He pinned Jeong Taeui down, covering him and holding his waist tightly.

"It's been less than ten days, but it seems you've already forgotten. Taeil, don't you remember what I said last time?"

"What did you say..."

"This body is mine. I said you are mine, and I realized that. Even after releasing, there might still be traces of me inside you, but did you forget that? No way."

"....—."

Jeong Taeui was speechless. It wasn't that he couldn't say anything, but his tongue seemed to freeze momentarily, preventing him from uttering a word.

Of course, Taeui couldn't possibly forget. The moment those lips whispered "*You are mine*" beside his ear still lingered deeply in his mind.

The repeated words, the sensation of his hands gliding over his skin, the taste of his tongue and teeth still faintly etched into every corner of his body. Just this morning, while showering, Taeui suddenly discovered that there was still a mark from Ilay in a place hard to see. At that moment, he felt like he wanted to stop breathing for a moment.

Damn it.

Jeong Taeui mumbled, stammering a blatant lie that anyone could see through.

"No, I don't know what you mean."

".....A ha. You don't know."

Above Jeong Taeui, he slightly lowered his head, a fleeting smile crossing his face. At that moment, Jeong Taeui snapped back to reality.

It's over.

"The bite marks on your nape haven't completely disappeared, so it's only been a few days; you shouldn't forget so easily. Yes. Taeui. I told you. From now on, every day you belong to me. You must realize that every day and remember it. If not, I'll help you. My semen will

never dry between your legs (if we do this every day). That way, you can recognize it correctly. You will never forget."

His warm tongue licked his nape. The words that penetrated his flesh and pierced his ears made Jeong Taeui shudder.

"It's not me.... You said you realized it! You said something different!"

"Haha. Now you know?"

Ilay laughed, his hand sliding from Taeui's neck down to his chest, slowly caressing his skin.

"Hey, don't touch me. I don't know anything. You said you realized it yourself! I never said that! Don't touch me! Why am I yours! Who wants to be yours!"

Ilay clicked his tongue, lightly biting his earlobe and licking his tongue, making Taeui feel ticklish. Jeong Taeui reflexively jerked and grabbed Ilay's shoulder, pushing hard. But his sturdy body didn't budge, like a rock.

Haha, Jeong Taeui heard a laugh. Ilay glanced at him when Taeui pushed his shoulder, his eyes looking at him as if he were a mischievous child.

"Jeong Taeil. Let go."

Ilay said quietly, and Taeui glared at him. Lying on the bed, his hands pushing against Ilay's shoulder, not moving.

"Let go. Don't make me say it twice."

His voice lowered a bit. Jeong Taeui pondered for a moment. He thought it would be wise to say, "Alright!" and pull his hands back quickly, avoiding further danger. But wouldn't that be too easy for him?

Realizing that Taeui only frowned and glared at him without any sign of moving his hands even after hesitating for a moment, Ilay sighed.

"Sometimes you do stupid things, like this... —Alright, that doesn't matter to me. Breaking your stupidity is what's interesting."

He whispered slowly, looking down at him. Despite the beautiful appearance of those fingers, his hand roughly grabbed Jeong Taeui's crotch, holding his member and the two small balls beneath it. He held it fiercely without hesitation.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!"

Jeong Taeui took a deep breath. Stars seemed to sparkle right before his eyes. No exaggeration, in an instant, his vision darkened and then brightened with white light. He didn't even realize his hands had let go of Ilay's shoulders. Jeong Taeui, with a pale face, grabbed Ilay's arm, clawing at it with his nails.

"Let go, let go.... let go... —Please, let go, please, please..."

Alright, I was wrong. Let go, you son of a bitch!

Luckily, he was still conscious enough to say the things he could and hold back what he couldn't. Jeong Taeui groaned, his mind feeling foggy. Sparks seemed to fly in his vision.

But to this man who could gnaw on his opponent's bones, one couldn't tell if he really intended to make his lower body useless.

Jeong Taeui swallowed, resisting urgently, but the man above him seemed not to hear his pleas. His hands tightened, and he squeezed even harder, making him silent.

Jeong Taeui passed out.

He lost consciousness for precisely about 3 to 4 seconds, as if his mind had been blown away momentarily. However, the reason his consciousness returned was also due to the pain squeezing his member, making him shiver.

"Let go....., your shoulder, I'm returning your shoulder... yours, you bastard, you told me to let go.....—!!!"

While groaning intermittently, Jeong Taeui fell into a distant consciousness. He wondered if he could fulfill the role of a true man for the rest of his life.

Until then, Ilay, who had pretended not to hear any of Taeui's pleas, finally loosened his grip slightly. Though it was like breaking a rock instead of a house. But with that small difference, Jeong Taeui could catch his breath again.

His eyes were wet. When Taeui opened his tear-filled eyes, he caught Ilay's gaze looking down at him.

"Taeil. Hands."

Ilay said briefly. Jeong Taeui, dazed, looked down at his hands, still mentally weak. His hands were gripping Ilay's arm. Only then did he realize his trembling hands were trying to pull Ilay's firm arm away from his lower body.

Jeong Taeui quickly let go.

"I let go. As you wanted. So you let go of it....."

"Wrap them around my neck."

"What?"

"My neck. Hold me. With your arms."

For a moment, Jeong Taeui seemed not to understand Ilay's words. No, in fact, he understood, but because he understood, he doubted if he was in so much pain that he had gone crazy. His

neck? Strangle him.....? Um. He surely couldn't have said that.

Ilay was telling him to hold his neck right now?

Jeong Taeui stared blankly at him, cold sweat dripping down his half-dazed face. His indifferent face looked down at him attentively. But when he blinked a few times in confusion and avoided that gaze, the hand gripping his member began to tighten again. To be fair, he was almost in a state of advancing and retreating simultaneously.

Jeong Taeui shuddered, hurriedly wrapping his arms around Ilay's neck.

Damn it, fine! I'll do what you say!

With the motivation that this position could strangle him anytime, Jeong Taeui held Ilay tighter, the heat from their contact making his whole body flush. He held Ilay's neck tightly and whispered into his nape.

"Alright. Let it go.... It really hurts, you know it as a man."

Jeong Taeui swallowed the last three words: 'You fucking bastard.'

However, if he let go so easily, he wouldn't be Ilay RieGrow, a true maniac. Ilay was silent for a moment, then suddenly tightened his grip.

"Ah! Uhm....——Damn....."

A short scream escaped Jeong Taeui's mouth. Tears of pain welled up.

"HEY, YOU BASTARD! YOU SAID WHAT, WHAT! I DID WHAT YOU SAID! BASTARD! YOU WANT TO MAKE ME A EUNUCH! DIRTY BASTARD, DAMN IT! LET GO, PLEASE! PLEASE!!! PLEASE LET GO..."

Jeong Taeui cursed like crazy and finally ended with pleas while still holding his neck tightly. Now he really had no mood to do anything other than loosen his grip. Then, a low laugh sounded in his ear.

"Jeong Taeil. You look like you're in pain. Did you forget your courage?"

"If it were you, would it hurt, you crazy bastard..."

"Keep it that way. Don't loosen your arms... —That's right. Then, one more thing. Say it with your mouth."

"What. Say what."

Jeong Taeui groaned with a voice mixed with tears, ready to say whatever the demon-like man in front of him wanted him to say. Things like, "Master, please save me," or "I'm the stupidest person in the world," or "I'm not capable of protecting a man's pride," or anything else.

But the words Ilay said immediately after were something he never thought of.

"You will not meet him."

"What...?"

"That kid. Ling Xinlu. Say that you will never meet him and will never think about meeting him again."

Jeong Taeui was speechless.

This was completely unexpected, and at the same time, it was something he couldn't respond to.

Saying that he wouldn't meet Xinlu.

This was an issue beyond Jeong Taeui's control. Because whether he liked it or not, he needed to meet him whenever possible. Even if there was nothing to say or no reason to meet, it was almost like a minimal obligation. Jeong Taeui hesitated and couldn't find the words, and immediately received a harsh squeeze on his member. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead and down his spine.

"Ahhh! Um... ugh... A...!! It hurts, it hurts, it hurts...!!!!"

"If you want to meet that kid so badly, then I'll crush it so you can't use it even if you do meet him."

"What do you mean by use ——Please, please, ...—, ... First, I won't go...—."

"Don't meet him even if he comes looking for you."

"...—HOW CAN THAT BE POSSIBLE!"

Jeong Taeui shouted. He was in so much pain and frustration that he was about to cry. Tears welled up because he realized that making the monster in front of him understand a human heart was indeed a task that could make one cry.

"You too, if you are human, try to think about it! If someone struggles because of you and has to give up a great job because of you, would you pretend to 'not see' them? How can a person do that!!!"

Jeong Taeui held Ilay's neck, thinking he should strangle him to death to match the pain he was feeling. He screamed behind Ilay's back, his heart crying out. It would be better to plead with a wall than to seek understanding from this non-human creature.

"...."

However, Jeong Taeui had almost fallen into a semi-conscious state from the pain, sobbing and hiccuping uncontrollably. His sobs continued to ring in Ilay's ears. Damn it. Only then

did he realize the pain in his groin had ceased, but the tingling sensation of numbness still remained.

Jeong Taeui seriously wondered if he was truly rendered useless from now on. Taeui hiccuped, his breath warming Ilay's neck, but he still held onto him tightly.

“Alright, then we can leave it at that for now.”

Jeong Taeui faintly heard Ilay talking to himself. His hand gently stroked Taeui's back, clinging to him like a koala, and suddenly, he became more gentle than usual.

Damn it.

He caused the sickness, and now he's the one giving the medicine, playing both roles himself.

“....Is that kid really that good?”

Ilay quietly stroked Taeui's back for a while before suddenly asking softly. Jeong Taeui hiccuped loudly, like someone caught stealing, and quickly closed his mouth, not answering.

“What's so good about him?”

He asked again. Jeong Taeui still didn't say anything.

What's good about him? Jeong Taeui thought. He liked those big, doe-like eyes, those cherry lips, and that gentle smile.

Was there any other child in the world as adorable as that?

But.

Jeong Taeui continued to hiccup and looked down at Ilay's back.

Even if he told him, Ilay wouldn't understand or agree. So why was he asking about that?

Jeong Taeui grew sullen with his own thoughts. Ilay was silent for a while, seemingly not demanding an answer from him.

“Jeong Taeui.”

“You are mine. You know that. You are mine.”

Ilay slowly said each word with extremely clear pronunciation into Taeui's ear. And as if he didn't necessarily need an answer, his hands that were stroking Taeui's back slowly slid down his waist and then to Taeui's buttocks.

Jeong Taeui was a bit shaken, his shoulders trembling. It was a very subtle reaction, but there was no way Ilay, who was being hugged tightly by Taeui, wouldn't notice. The hand that was caressing his buttocks squeezed harder.

“Don't worry. You've done it before, what's there to be nervous about? Relax.”

“...Do you really have to put it in?”

Right now, he didn't want to do anything, not even a bit of playing around. If Ilay didn't insert it, Jeong Taeui might even thank him. Besides, his member was still tingling and would likely stay down for a while longer.

But after thinking about it, a question arose in his mind that ignited his anger.

Why him?

No. From what he understood, Ilay was practically torturing himself. Right. From the very beginning, Jeong Taeui had pointed a gun at Ilay's head, but he was thankful that Ilay hadn't killed him with his crazy temper.

But why did his sexual preferences have to be so terrible?

Thinking in a conventional way, for someone born with a diamond spoon like Ilay, shouldn't there be dozens of beautiful women, who he could only see in movies, always ready to warm his bed? If Ilay wanted to torture him, wouldn't it be better to beat him or abuse him or, even better, lock him up for life? This was the big issue—.

And then Jeong Taeui recalled a distant memory.

“Jeong Taeil... Don't you think so? It's so soft. Once you get used to it, your body will naturally react.”

Despite his cries that he would die in pain? If he got used to it, what would he become? Just thinking about it made him feel sick...

“.....”

His body was amazing.

Jeong Taeui seriously thought about words that would never come out of his mouth even if Ilay beat him to death. He couldn't have sex with himself, so he didn't know what it felt like (to be soft or familiar).

Jeong Taeui glanced sideways at Ilay with a skeptical look. He was still holding onto Ilay's neck, so he couldn't see Ilay's expression. But even so, one of Ilay's fingers was continuously stretching the small hole between Jeong Taeui's buttocks. Ugh, a groan escaped Taeui's mouth before he realized it. Damn it. Ilay was preparing everything to put his massive member inside him.

Jeong Taeui's face turned pale. Although he knew he wouldn't die, the primal fear still surfaced no matter how many times he experienced it. No, it was even more terrifying because he had experienced it before.

“Hey... do you really have to put it in...? How about using my hands? I'll do it for you. I'm good at it.”

Jeong Taeui quickly said, feeling anxious, but was only met with laughter.

“Are you joking? Stop clenching your butt. After just a few days, your body is tight again. It feels great and delicious. But it’s too tight for my liking. It’s better to loosen it a bit so my thing can fit snugly in your hole... It’s good that I’m on vacation, so let’s work hard and slowly make it fit my size.”

Jeong Taeui, amidst Ilay’s embarrassing remarks, suddenly noticed something strange in what Ilay said.

“What now?”

“Hm? I said I’m going to put it in now. If your body wasn’t mine, I’d have just shoved it in.”

“My body isn’t yours!... Damn it, but that’s not it. You mentioned a vacation?”

Jeong Taeui yelled at Ilay and then immediately shook his head, turning to question him. Ilay raised an eyebrow and nodded.

“Ah, right. It was difficult to handle, but I managed to sort out the urgent matters. I’ve slept less than 20 hours the entire past week, so I’m pretty tired now. There’s nothing holding me back anymore. I can relax a bit.”

“Oh, really? That’s... no, wait, a vacation?”

A vacation for someone who left work unauthorized and stole a private jet? Instead of writing a ton of reports and being released after a few months in jail?

Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay suspiciously.

“So about this vacation...”

“I took sick leave. Recently, my body has been weak, so five weeks is enough time to recover.”

This time Jeong Taeui was completely speechless at Ilay’s straightforward answer.

“Your body... weak... weak?”

Jeong Taeui repeated the words he couldn’t comprehend coming from this man’s mouth. He loosened his arms around Ilay’s neck and leaned back a bit to look intently at his face.

He stared at Ilay’s face – the man who claimed his body had weakened – and then slowly looked down.

No different from before, what he saw was a perfectly healthy and robust body. Even the massive weapon below was just as he remembered.

“You’re not really sick, are you...?”

Jeong Taeui asked, looking at him doubtfully. Ilay raised an eyebrow. Then he smiled. And that smile was the answer.

This is a fraud. He took sick leave because he was so cold-hearted that he could freeze someone to death. Such ridiculous excuses, and the branch still turned a blind eye to them. He's weak enough to defeat an ox barehanded, how ridiculous.

Vol 5 - Chapter 12: Because you will get tired (18+)

Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay with a huge question mark on his face. Just then, another finger slipped in, probing deep inside him. Ugh, Jeong Taeui groaned instinctively and loosened his grip on Ilay's neck. Ilay whispered in his ear as he slid his finger deeper.

"See, I told you to hold on properly."

As he spoke, he pushed his finger even deeper, causing Jeong Taeui to quickly tighten his grip around Ilay's neck again. A soft chuckle echoed, and it seemed like Ilay brushed his lips against Jeong Taeui's ear and sucked on it, but he wasn't quite sure.

A vacation. A five-week vacation. Did this mean he would have to follow this crazy man for five weeks?

Jeong Taeui's eyes widened.

".....Ah."

Another finger thrust deep inside his small hole. Slowly, gradually, it went in and then paused a bit, then continued to twist around inside, sending shivers down Jeong Taeui's spine.

Alright. Though it couldn't be called comfortable, it wasn't exactly painful either. Up to this point, it was still manageable. If it stayed at this level, it was tolerable.

But.

The moment the fingers that had been playing deep inside him withdrew with wet, squelching sounds, Jeong Taeui suddenly felt a faint fear at the unnamed comfort that washed over him.

His grip around Ilay's neck tightened.

"Because you'll get tired."

With a clicking sound, the massive flesh immediately replaced the fingers that had just pulled out and rubbed against the entrance of his small hole. Ugh, Jeong Taeui instinctively tensed up. Even if he tried to close his legs, the massive weapon remained firmly lodged between his thighs.

Taeui could feel Ilay's hands gripping his hips, and every time Ilay spread his buttocks, the heavy member pressed harder against his entrance.

"WAIT! I'D RATHER... LET'S DO IT WITH THE MOUTH! WITH THE MOUTH."

Jeong Taeui shouted without thinking. The shout took him back to a past memory, and he immediately regretted saying that, but still, using the mouth was better than direct penetration—it at least avoided the risk of being bedridden the next day.

Ilay's movements stopped just as the massive, erect flesh touched Taeui's small hole. He held the position for a moment before speaking.

"...Is this really that difficult?"

"Difficult. Incredibly difficult!!!"

Jeong Taeui responded without hesitation. Ilay fell silent again. With his face buried in Ilay's neck, Taeui couldn't see his expression. Jeong Taeui worried for a moment, resolute that even if he had said that, if Ilay still wanted to insert it, he should try to end it as quickly as possible.

"...What do you plan to do next? Even if you avoid it today, you can't avoid it forever."

"First..."

As soon as he heard Ilay speak, Jeong Taeui decided to do whatever it took to escape from this man. This was no longer a matter of grudges; it was a matter of survival.

Suddenly, Ilay touched Jeong Taeui's arms wrapped around his neck. Jeong Taeui let go, and Ilay bent down to look closely at him. The feeling was incredibly uncomfortable, receiving that piercing gaze from Ilay. He was lost in thought for a moment.

"I really... To live, I will try anything."

Jeong Taeui muttered to himself. But unlike his sharp tone, Ilay's expression didn't seem dangerous. Instead, perhaps even unconsciously, the corners of his mouth curved into a perfect smile, as if he was genuinely pleased.

Jeong Taeui raised an eyebrow in curiosity. What's going on? What's with him... But before he could ask, Ilay firmly grasped the back of his knees and pushed them forward. His body immediately bent, leaving his back suspended in the air, exposing the small wet hole between his legs. Jeong Taeui held his breath.

Ilay didn't hesitate to bury his face between Jeong Taeui's legs, licking him. His tongue kept swirling inside the small hole, making Taeui feel as if Ilay wanted to lick every part of his insides.

"Hey... Wait, that's, that's dirty."

But as if he didn't hear Taeui's shocked shouts, his soft tongue continued to slip in and probe deeper inside him. The feeling was entirely different from using hands or being penetrated by Ilay's flesh. There was no pain or discomfort, but Jeong Taeui couldn't stop his body from aching at the unfamiliar sensation, sending shivers down his spine like electricity.

"No, not like that, I meant I'll use my mouth for you, not you, I meant me..."

Jeong Taeui struggled and shouted, but Ilay didn't respond.

There's no way this man could misunderstand him. Ilay glanced at Jeong Taeui from an extremely embarrassing angle, his eyes smiling.

“We can save that for later. Today, I definitely have to insert it. I have to thrust deep inside you so this small hole can cling to my flesh. But since I feel sorry that you’re tired of it, I’ll insert it when this small hole feels comfortable and loosened, so you should be grateful and relax.”

He whispered while licking and sucking on Taeui's lower body, the words stabbing directly into his ear. The wet, sticky sounds were vivid.

Jeong Taeui wanted to faint. No, he really wanted to pass out right then.

Just do it. Just do whatever you want. It's better to insert it and finish quickly.

Jeong Taeui made a tearful decision. To face such an embarrassing situation, he decided to keep quiet no matter what was done to him from now on.

Jeong Taeui blinked in a daze, wondering if he was in pain anywhere. He pressed some spots and rolled over a bit to the right and left, and indeed, there was no pain anywhere.

[illegible]

Jeong Taeui cried out and let out a long sigh. In the bathroom, the sound of running water echoed. Ilay was bathing without closing the door, even humming some tune, seemingly in a very good mood. The more Jeong Taeui listened to the song, the more the wrinkles between his brows deepened.

His body seemed to creak with every movement, but when he turned and lay on his side, a warm, tingling sensation spread through him. Ouch, he couldn't help but groan softly. Jeong Taeui wanted to lie still and not move for a while, but his still-damp hair made him uncomfortable, so he turned his head and carefully changed positions.

Jeong Taeui lay on his side and sighed, the scent of his shampoo faintly lingering in the air.

Facing death, no matter where he went, there were many things he couldn't say. Time passed slowly for Taeui. He just wanted to lie still and sleep soundly, even with his body still sticky after their making love. After climaxing inside him countless times, Ilay finally withdrew his monstrous member from his body and collapsed on top of him in utter satisfaction.

Jeong Taeui couldn't help but groan as that massive flesh continually thrust deep inside him, as if it wanted to split him in two. For a long time, that thick length didn't release him easily and couldn't withdraw smoothly either. It was rigid, slowly pulling out bit by bit, and Jeong Taeui swallowed his groans as Ilay's thrusts became more mechanical, gradually extracting his enormous member.

“If it’s that difficult, I’d rather use a dildo of a suitable size regularly with your hole. Then it will get used to the size and naturally loosen up, so you’ll feel more comfortable.”

Jeong Taeui could feel Ilay's fingers touching every wrinkle as if checking for tears. He thought to himself that he could only lie motionless like a dead fish and listen to Ilay's words, which seemed to mix in some dark gore humor.

Then he lifted his heavy eyelids. Ilay was carefully inspecting his lower body. Their eyes met. Jeong Taeui realized that Ilay wasn't joking when he calmly spoke.

"Shall we start with a medium size?"

Although he was too tired to even open his mouth, Jeong Taeui didn't hesitate to clench his fist. Seeing his fingers tightening into a fist, Ilay smiled. Jeong Taeui didn't say anything more from that point on.

"Alright then, let's go."

Ilay, who claimed to be very weak (though showing no signs of illness), jumped off the bed and carried Jeong Taeui, who was lying like a dead fish, into the bathroom.

Even if Ilay beat him to death now, he wouldn't be able to move a single finger. Ilay washed Jeong Taeui thoroughly without any difficulty, cleaning the inside of his body. Finally, he wrapped Taeui in a towel, dried him off, and carried him back to the bed.

Jeong Taeui sighed deeply as he listened to the sound of the shower.

He was indeed a monster pretending to be strangely kind.

Jeong Taeui raised his arm. It was dry, soft, and free of bite marks. Of course, his legs hurt to the point of near paralysis, but at least there was no more discomfort.

"At least there's something that proves you're still human...."

Jeong Taeui mumbled, though his voice couldn't even escape his hoarse throat.

"...."

In fact, objectively speaking, without the resentment, having sex with Ilay wasn't that bad. Obviously, he was an unethical person, and Taeui had been assaulted in the past, but Ilay's behavior in bed wasn't terrible.

Maybe, if the thing between his legs didn't look like a monster, Jeong Taeui might even be willing to play with him often.

Alright. Since things have come to this, I'll just work hard and try to get used to it. After all, both his skills and stamina are outstanding...

... No, even so, I can't. It's too difficult to get used to that monstrous thing. Jeong Taeui seriously thought about how to become friends with it.

"Maybe it would have been better if the minion sent by Xinlu had managed to take me away without losing me..."

Jeong Taeui muttered to himself without realizing it, then suddenly jolted by his own words and shut his mouth tightly. He glanced toward the bathroom, but fortunately, his voice had been drowned out by the sound of running water, so his monologue likely hadn't reached Ilay's ears.

If he had heard those words, it would have been a big problem. This was the man who had threatened to turn him into a eunuch just because he said he wanted to see Xinlu.

"... I really... I want to know..."

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue. His stomach suddenly felt uneasy, so he reached for the beer can Ilay had left behind when he carried him to the bed. As he lifted his upper body and lay down on his stomach, Jeong Taeui mumbled, "Am I going to die..."

After gulping down four or five sips of cold beer, he thought he wanted more. Jeong Taeui wondered what the hell this man was thinking, trying to guess with his muddled mind.

"If I follow my reason. Taeil, you'd have died several times by now."

Suddenly, Ilay's deep voice echoed in his mind.

"Don't think about that kid anymore. Forget him. There's no reason or need for you to see him again. So stop thinking about him."

"I thought about it too, but I came to the conclusion that you are mine. And I can guess the reason in my own way, but I'm not sure. There's no basis to judge if it's right or wrong."

"That kid, Ling Shinru. Say you won't see him and don't intend to see him."

"Is he that good?"

"What's so good about him?"

"Jeong Taeui. You are mine. Understand. You are mine."

Disconnected voices echoed in his mind, Ilay's hands constantly caressing his back as he spoke those words. When Jeong Taeui hugged his neck, Ilay smiled and kissed his earlobe, then brushed his lips over his. His eyes attentively scanned his body as they finished making love.

"...."

Jeong Taeui frowned and gulped down his beer. The liquid, now warm from being held in his mouth while he was lost in thought, slid down his throat.

"Let's see, those are all bases that can easily lead to the same conclusion..."

As he slowly drank the rest of the beer, Jeong Taeui furrowed his brow.

Even if you met a random passerby and said those words, they would come to the same conclusion. There's no need to reiterate that Ilay RieGrow isn't a normal person and doesn't care about anyone's feelings.

"...I don't think he really likes me..."

Jeong Taeui inadvertently muttered aloud while staring at the flower pattern on the wallpaper above the bed. But he managed to shut his mouth before finishing the sentence. He recalled the thought that had just crossed his mind and immediately dismissed it in astonishment. Jeong Taeui mumbled, "No way," and shook his head.

"No, that's not it. How could it be like that? That can't just be normal human emotion... So what the hell is it?"

Jeong Taeui sighed and shook his head.

"Even in this situation, I can still understand other people. At least if he were like that damn Lieutenant Kim, I would seriously doubt if he really... But it can't be him."

"I bet my life on the fact that he's a person completely incapable of such a human aspect."

"This life of yours isn't yours to bet anymore, so what are you planning to wager it on?"

Jeong Taeui was startled by the sudden voice behind him and almost jumped up. The beer can he was holding sloshed continuously.

When he turned around, Ilay was walking toward him, drying his hair with a towel, seemingly just out of the shower.

"It looks like you were talking to yourself about something funny. But what are you planning to wager your life on?"

"Huh? Oh... um... Just... my senses and spiritual world, um..."

Jeong Taeui stammered and avoided Ilay's question. Ilay took a beer from the fridge and approached him.

Jeong Taeui stared blankly at his face as he sat down on the bed and drank the beer.

His exterior truly betrayed his interior. His still-wet but elegant naked body was unimaginable to contain such a frightening spiritual world. The beer he had just drunk turned bitter.

It had been a long time since Jeong Taeui realized his own sexual orientation. He preferred men over women. But perhaps he would also be fine with a woman. It made sense because Jeong Taeui's type was young, beautiful, and cute boys.

Yes, even if he liked men, the man in front of him was not his type at all. A cold yet elegant appearance, and of course, his personality did not match Jeong Taeui's preferences at all. Above all, he wasn't someone who would willingly be submissive to another man.

But the world is full of surprises. How did things turn out this way? The opponent was too strong in many ways, so it couldn't just be a coincidence. In the end, Jeong Taeui cautiously considered this and that and came to the most reasonable conclusion – even if he couldn't believe it – but maybe this man liked himself...

"... No... I also thought so, but thinking about the spiritual world... can that really happen?"

Jeong Taeui rubbed his forehead and mumbled. He only murmured lightly in a barely audible voice, but Ilay must have heard it as he turned his head from where he sat on the edge of the bed.

"The spiritual world? Whose?"

"Ah... I just think I don't understand how someone can give a perfectly healthy and undefeated man a sick leave."

Jeong Taeui diverted the conversation.

Obviously, the day was far from over, but the sky outside was already gray. This was a city where every building seemed to be lit up day and night. But night time was different from daytime; the difference lay in the silent atmosphere of the night hovering outside.

Jeong Taeui thought about it again after accidentally blurting it out. Thinking back, he remembered that Ilay had said he was on a break. Hmm. A sick leave. Did he say it would last five weeks?

That was an absurdly long time. Of course, if someone took sick leave, it might mean they had to be hospitalized or recover from a severe issue. But there's no way it could be just for common fatigue.

"What reason did you get five weeks off for?"

Jeong Taeui turned onto his side and asked Ilay. As he shifted his body, an unconscious groan escaped his lips. Ilay quietly looked down at Jeong Taeui and finished his beer.

"You said you wanted to meet Jeong Jaeil. Did you forget? Or do you not want to see him anymore?"

Jeong Taeui was momentarily speechless and stared at him.

He hadn't forgotten; he always remembered. And he always wanted to meet Jeong Taeui. It was just unexpected for Ilay to bring it up himself.

"No... I want to meet my brother. I want to see him. Do you want to go too?"

Jeong Taeui asked back in a daze. Ilay responded briefly.

"Five weeks. If we can't meet him within that time, you have to give up."

Vol 5 - Chapter 13: Bring you to Seringe

Jeong Taeui looked at him again. His head was spinning. It seemed like Ilay really wanted to go there. No, more accurately, Ilay was ready to go with him. Jeong Taeui had the chance to meet his brother... although he always thought he would see his brother again someday, he didn't think the opportunity would come so soon.

Jeong Taeui nodded once - "Ah."

As expected. It was just a coincidence of interests.

From the standpoint of UNHRDO, that organization was also looking for Jeong Jaeui. Ilay was part of UNHRDO, and a five-week vacation was indeed too unreasonable, so it was to serve this purpose. Anyway, if Jeong Taeui went along, the chances of finding Jeong Jaeui would be higher. And it seemed many people expected him to meet his brother.

Jeong Taeui soon realized that the answer to all these things was indeed that.

He sat up. His weak body made him stagger, but if he tried, he could still move. However, the weight of his body on his legs and lower back, which were in severe pain, prevented him from sitting up straight and forced him to bend over.

Jeong Taeui sat there with furrowed brows for a while and sighed as the dull pain spreading from his lower back to his whole body gradually subsided.

"You're weaker than you look."

Ilay, who had been staring at Jeong Taeui, suddenly muttered. As soon as he heard that, Jeong Taeui, who was about to tear up, shouted angrily.

"I'm not weak, you bastard...!"

"Am I?"

"...The people who did that to you should be fine soon after getting that fierce thing stuck in them, right?"

"Well... yeah."

Ilay pondered for a moment and then shrugged innocently.

"I don't know, because it's not my business."

This bastard, hasn't his behavior always been good after doing that?

Jeong Taeui stared at Ilay in astonishment, then sighed and waved his hand. The more he thought about it, the more incomprehensible things became. There were more important issues now.

"Alright, will you go? To Seringe?"

Jeong Taeui suddenly felt interested.

He could go there. And stay there. He could leave this place of confinement with its invisible bars. (Although he would still have to go with the bastard behind those bars.)

With expectant eyes, Taeui leaned towards Ilay. Holding a beer can in one hand and tapping a rhythm with his index finger, Ilay looked at him silently.

"You seem to be in a good mood."

"Yes. There's no reason to be in a bad mood."

Jeong Taeui tilted his head and shrugged. Ilay stared at him without a word, lost in thought, and finally nodded.

"We can start anytime you want. But the deadline is from yesterday, and we have to return within exactly five weeks. Whether you meet Jeong Jaeil or not."

Five weeks. He didn't know if that was short or just enough time. Anyway, he already knew where to go, so it was all about luck now.

If he was lucky enough, he would be able to meet him; if not, he wouldn't. Maybe because he had never heard of anyone meeting Jeong Jaeui, he thought it would be very difficult. Even within five weeks or five years, he might not be able to meet him.

Jeong Taeui looked down at his hand. An invisible red thread was tied to his pinky finger. And in reality, Jeong Jaeui had already cut it. He hadn't known that luck couldn't follow him anymore.

But even so.

"Today. As soon as the sun rises."

Jeong Taeui spoke without thinking. On the earliest flight there, he would go to meet Jeong Jaeui.

Ilay seemed to have anticipated his answer, but he just smiled and shook his head.

"If you get on a flight that leaves in just 6 hours and lasts 13 hours with your current condition, you might need to find a doctor on the plane first. Just sleep for now. You look as pale as a ghost."

"Huh?"

Jeong Taeui confusedly rubbed his face. Right, thinking about it, he felt uncomfortable with his appearance now.

In fact, if someone just lightly pushed him now, he might fall and not be able to get up. He had tried standing up and sitting down a while ago, but his body kept trembling.

"Hmmm—yes, it might be a bit dangerous."

Lack of sleep would deplete his physical strength and accumulate fatigue.

Ilay pushed Taeui's shoulder down onto the bed as he grumbled angrily - "So when can we go?"

When his back hit the mattress, Jeong Taeui groaned like an old man.

"I'll book a flight for tomorrow. Just sleep today. Where do you think you're going with that body?"

Ilay looked at him with his eyes glistening, seemingly pitying him as he groaned in pain. Even though he felt helpless, Jeong Taeui still glared at Ilay with all his might.

"It would be the same even if you didn't touch me."

"So, it means it will be the same tomorrow if I touch you?"

"Why do you always have to be like this...!"

Why did this bastard keep pretending not to understand? But despite Jeong Taeui's wide-eyed glare, Ilay remained motionless, quietly stroking his chin and seemingly lost in thought for a moment before speaking.

"This means it doesn't matter whether you get on a plane tomorrow or the day after. So let's just go today."

Jeong Taeui knew this man well, and even though he hadn't been with him for months, he quickly realized that what Ilay just said was a mix of seriousness and jest. But it seemed the parts Jeong Taeui wanted to be jokes and the parts Ilay wanted to be serious didn't match up.

"Please... have mercy... on me..."

Jeong Taeui groaned as he buried his face into the blanket. Nothing was more foolish than begging for approval from a man named Ilay RieGrow, but he still spoke in a small, helpless voice, trying to appear as pitiful and weak as possible. Though it probably wouldn't help.

But whether Ilay truly found him pitiful or not, it seemed Jeong Taeui's act had some effect. Ilay suddenly smiled.

"Alright. Until we get to Seringe, I'll try to be 'gentle' with you while we're here."

Jeong Taeui, lying on his stomach, could feel Ilay's fair hand slide over his thigh and fondle his buttocks. He shuddered, weakly curling up, but the hand lingered around his waist and hips before letting go.

However, before he could feel relieved, that hand roamed across his back and caressed his nape. Finally, Ilay gently grasped Taeui's chin.

"...?"

He grabbed his chin, turning his head so that he couldn't help but look up and meet Ilay's gaze. Jeong Taeui met that gaze without hesitation. Ilay's thumb slowly rubbed against his lips, gently, and as his lips parted, Ilay's fingers quickly slipped inside, pressing against his tongue.

Reflexively, Jeong Taeui turned his head, Ilay's fingers continually moving in and out of his mouth, mingling with his tongue and teeth. The hand, now slick with saliva, traced over his lips as if following a trail.

"....!"

Jeong Taeui glared at him fiercely. Damn it. This doesn't seem gentle at all!

Ilay seemed to understand what Taeui was trying to convey. But as if that was the exact reaction he wanted, he smiled again. His eyes curved slightly, his pale thumb rubbing Taeui's lips, while the rest of his fingers gently cupped and caressed his cheek. It was strange, Jeong Taeui looked into Ilay's smiling eyes with suspicion.

So. Whether he liked or disliked playing with others—though the truth was, the way he touched his cheek, fondled his lips, and stroked his nape wasn't as uncomfortable as he thought—what should he say about this? This surely...

...No. Because this man was Ilay RieGrow. For him, emotions and humanity, how could it be?

No. No. No. No way!

Jeong Taeui pondered for a while. A vague, itching suspicion had been gnawing at his chest from earlier. He didn't know how to describe it, and it was frightening to know what it might be. And, of course, he didn't think he should know.

"...What is it?"

Jeong Taeui murmured to himself with a sigh after thinking about it for a while, so quietly that even he couldn't hear it. Ilay's fingers continued to play with his lips and then delved back in to tease his tongue. Jeong Taeui quietly bit down on the intruding finger.

The finger, which seemed about to withdraw, instead wrapped around his tongue more aggressively.

Fine, do whatever you like, just keep going!

Jeong Taeui lay on his side on the bed and closed his eyes. Finally, the hand that had been holding his cheek for a moment let go. Ilay's gaze seemed to linger on his face for a long

time, but Jeong Taeui couldn't feel its presence anymore because he had passed out and fallen asleep for 12 hours.

Seringe II:

Jeong Taeui's first impression of this man was that he was very reserved and straightforward. He looked to be in his late thirties or early forties, his age hard to guess among the crowd at the airport gate.

His smile lifted cautiously, creating faint wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. He seemed friendly and surprisingly pleasant, but unfortunately, this man didn't smile much. He almost always kept a blank expression, and his mouth rarely curved upwards.

As soon as he stepped through the gate, he stood out starkly among the crowd waiting for passengers or their loved ones. At least during the three-hour layover in Johannesburg, there were quite a few white people. But at the Dar es Salaam International Airport, there were none; everyone was black. Standing alone in that crowd, a white man like him was extremely conspicuous.

This airport was so small it looked like any rural bus station, even though it was an international airport. When the man saw the two of them step through the gate, he stood up straight.

"Long time no see, Rick."

The man's face showed no signs of joy or enthusiasm as he spoke. He then turned to Taeui and extended his hand, still without a smile.

"Mr. Jeong Taeui? I've heard about you from the boss. Nice to meet you. I'm Yuri Gable."

"Ah... nice to meet you. I'm Jeong Taeui."

Jeong Taeui shook his hand, thinking it was a bit awkward that someone made such an effort to pronounce his name correctly.

He hadn't expected to meet anyone. He had flown straight here with Ilay without any specific plan, so he thought he should ask about a hotel at the information desk first.

But hearing the name Yuri Gable triggered some of his memories. He recalled hearing that this was someone under Kyle's command, who had scoured the Middle East looking for traces of Jeong Jaeui. And finally, he had found a clue.

Jeong Taeui glanced at Ilay. Ilay was observing the airport with an indifferent expression.

"Small, isn't it?"

"This is your first time in Africa, right? Most international airports in Africa are small like this. Only Johannesburg's airport is significantly larger."

Gable responded as part of his job, then turned and started walking.

Jeong Taeui quickly followed him, realizing he had no intention of waiting.

"You must have waited a long time. It took me longer than expected because of visa issues."

Taeui had thought he could get through quickly with his local visa, but the process was delayed, so he only managed to get out after most people had already left. He walked slowly, not knowing someone would be waiting for him.

"If I'd known you were waiting, I would have hurried. I'm sorry."

"It's no problem, Mr. Jeong Taeui."

Jeong Taeui looked at the man ahead, who answered politely and tried to pronounce his name clearly, and he smiled.

"You can just call me Tae. Feel free."

Gable nodded but spoke little. It had been a long time since he met such a reserved and stiff Westerner. Of course, back at Kyle's place, he had encountered some quiet and hard-to-approach guests, and it took him a long time to get close to Peter, the family's gardener. But this man was even more exceptional.

"What about Jeong Jaeil?"

Ilay, walking half a step behind Jeong Taeui, suddenly asked.

"He's in Seringe."

"Are you sure?"

"It's hard to be certain."

"What are the odds?"

"Well, about 70 or 80 percent."

Short exchanges followed. Ilay nodded. When the three of them exited the building, a Jeep was waiting right in front. Gable climbed into the passenger seat, and the Black man waiting in the driver's seat shifted gears. After a brief greeting, the vehicle finally set off.

After the nearly 17-hour flight from Hong Kong, Jeong Taeui felt like he was finally setting foot on solid ground. He leaned against the hard seat and sighed softly.

Seventy or eighty percent. While that's not a low probability, it also isn't high enough to bet on a five-week trip. However, he thought that his uncle and Kyle wouldn't engage in such a venture with a low success rate.

If he started the search here and his brother wasn't found, he would have to return to Hong Kong, making it no different from a five-week vacation in a distant country.

Jeong Taeui scratched his head, and beside him, Ilay spoke slowly.

"If this man says the probability is about 70-80%, then it's quite certain that Jeong Jaeil is here. Now you just have to worry about how to meet him."

At Ilay's words, Jeong Taeui looked ahead. Hearing their conversation, Gable's eyes met his through the rearview mirror. The taciturn man looked at him for a moment before speaking.

"You're Jeong Jaeui's brother, right?"

"Yes."

Then he looked at Taeui through the mirror in silence.

"You look like your brother."

"Do I?"

Jeong Taeui responded, but that was all. The man said nothing more about their resemblance. Perhaps he was just making polite conversation.

On second thought, people often said that Westerners couldn't distinguish Asian faces from one another. So, maybe to a Westerner, all Asians with thin faces, yellow skin, and black hair looked the same.

"I think we'll go straight to Seringe, is that okay?"

At Gable's question, Jeong Taeui nodded. Come to think of it, it was called an island. They would get there by a light aircraft from Dar es Salaam.

The car entered the town. The market with its low, old buildings was crowded with people everywhere. People were packed into every corner.

The streets were filled with people dressed in black, and the car moved at a snail's pace. Jeong Taeui felt a bit carsick. The smell was no different from burning tires.

It had been a long time since he felt carsick. But after a long flight, he had immediately gotten into an uncomfortable car on a bumpy road.

"Is Dar es Salaam...that big?"

Jeong Taeui sipped some water and asked. Gable glanced at the rearview mirror and replied.

"It's the largest in Tanzania. The population is over a million."

"A million..."

Jeong Taeui sipped some more water, thinking that this place might be comparable to a metropolitan city. He tried to calm the nausea in his stomach and looked outside. Ilay beside him glanced at Taeui and suddenly asked.

"I heard the airport is next to the port. How long does it take to get to the port?"

"We'll be there in about 15 minutes. Then we transfer to a small plane, and it's another 40 minutes to Seringe."

Fifteen more minutes. Jeong Taeui sighed deeply. That much he could endure. He took another sip of water, and soon the bottle was empty. He shook the empty bottle lightly and sighed, but Ilay had already grabbed another bottle and tossed it to him. Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay and gently caught it with one hand.

"With your current condition, even if you meet Jeong Jaeil, you wouldn't have the strength to bring him out."

"I never intended to drag him away in the first place. If my brother doesn't want to leave, I have no way to make him."

Jeong Taeui shook his head and opened the water bottle. He drank it down in one gulp without thinking, but then immediately frowned in confusion. Finally, he looked at the label on the bottle again.

"...I do feel nauseous, but why give me sparkling water?"

Seeing Jeong Taeui grumbling as he swallowed the water with a look of disgust, Ilay, who had obviously done it on purpose, just smiled in amusement.

Meanwhile, the car passed through a crowded market area with hardly any dedicated lanes. And, as Gable had said, they soon arrived at a small airstrip connected to the port.

People often say that physical torture is easier to endure than mental torture, but this was truly an excruciating long-term ordeal for Taeui. By the time they reached the end of the journey, Taeui felt like he had just gone through 72 hardships of life.

Behind the cramped seats of the shabby four-seater light aircraft was the luggage compartment. A large bundle of something like a rolled-up carpet protruded from the luggage area, pressing against Taeui's back on the flight to Seringe.

Listening to the roar of the light aircraft's engine for 40 minutes, almost pressed into the backrest of the seat in front, Jeong Taeui deeply regretted not choosing to travel by boat.

The man had said that taking a boat would take longer, but if he had known he would be punished for his foolish choice by being tormented in a plane that felt like it was tumbling in the air, he would have chosen the boat without hesitation.

Ilay looked at him and quietly said - "Maybe you should have taken the boat instead."

Next to Jeong Taeui, Ilay was getting off the plane. Taeui glanced at him with a weary face, for some reason wishing this man could have the human emotion called "worry."

"When I looked down from the plane, the color of the sea was beautiful. It would have been great to enjoy it from a boat."

"..."

Jeong Taeui felt foolish for even momentarily expecting that the emotion of "worry" would appear in this man. He thought Ilay must be trying to provoke him, because at this moment he had no interest in admiring the beauty of the sea.

Why is this man becoming worse and worse... It seems the deeper I understand him, the more wicked he appears.

Vol 5 - Chapter 14: A peaceful moment.

Standing on solid ground and breathing in the cool breeze, Jeong Taeui felt much better. He rubbed his stomach, and the nausea subsided. Taking a deep breath, he patted his cheek.

"It's not far from here to the accommodation. About a 10-minute drive... you could walk if you want, but it might take a few hours."

Gable spoke bluntly, as if feeling some pity for Jeong Taeui's pale face. Hm, Jeong Taeui patted his stomach a few times, feeling the wind blow past and breathing in the air that no longer smelled of fuel, he felt much better. He couldn't handle even a 10-minute drive, let alone a longer one. Normally, he wasn't prone to motion sickness.

Jeong Taeui looked up at the sky. The sun was starting to set. In a few hours, darkness would soon envelop everything.

"Do you have a map?"

Gable nodded, perhaps realizing that Jeong Taeui's question meant he had decided to walk.

"I know the way. You want to walk?"

Gable spoke while looking down, and Jeong Taeui realized his gaze was checking the condition of his bandaged leg. He sighed and shook his ankle.

"Walking would be better, after all, I don't have to run. Is the path too rough?"

"Not really, but are you sure you're okay?"

Jeong Taeui smiled brightly at Gable's question and nodded. Then, he added,

"My leg is fine. If I have a map, even without you, I can get there because the map will guide me."

Jeong Taeui added - "I may look like this, but I'm pretty good at reading maps." Gable nonchalantly shook his head and began striding forward. Jeong Taeui scratched his head, then shrugged and followed him. Looking at Gable's back, about ten steps ahead, Jeong Taeui marveled silently.

"Truly a man of few words."

"Yeah, he's always been like that."

Ilay replied beside him, and Jeong Taeui glanced at him.

"You two know each other?"

"Yes. He often worked with James. When I was young, he used to come to my house frequently. After that, he moved departments, so I rarely saw him."

Jeong Taeui nodded, thinking about the man named James he had met once at Kyle's house. Well, if he worked under Kyle, he must be quite familiar with him.

Jeong Taeui slowly looked around and followed Gable, who maintained a reasonable distance, not too close but not too far, as if minimizing his presence.

After leaving the airstrip, the three walked along the main road for a while and then turned into a wide alley. They then came to a broad asphalt road wide enough for two cars to pass. Only a few cars were scattered along the road, and the quiet sidewalks were shaded by trees.

Gable stopped at the crosswalk ahead, waiting for the red light to turn green on the quiet road. Seeing Gable's somber expression as he watched the traffic light, Jeong Taeui smiled and stood behind him. Girls cycling by glanced curiously at them. Jeong Taeui chuckled at their innocent eyes peeking out from under their headscarves. The girls gradually disappeared, looking rather surprised.

"I thought this was Africa, but it's a Muslim city."

"This island is considered a sanctuary for Arabs. It's not a place where a specific industry can develop or receive government aid. Most of the people here live off the money spent by the super-rich Arabs. So the culture is heavily influenced by Islam. You can think of it as a small town in the Middle East. Therefore, do not laugh or talk with the local women."

Gable spoke bluntly.

"Oh, I see."

Jeong Taeui scratched his head, pondering - "I'm not sure if I did anything risky just now."

The traffic light turned green.

Jeong Taeui suddenly felt at ease on this quiet road, with only a few cars and the occasional pedestrian. After walking for some distance, Gable passed a small mosque and turned into an alley ahead.

It wasn't a wide road but a narrow alley just wide enough for a car to pass through, winding through houses built like a maze. The houses with bare plaster walls lined both sides of the alley, occasionally a child would dart out of a wooden door, or an old man would sit sunning himself on a chair by the gate, leisurely holding a pipe. Beyond the fences, lush tree branches shaded the sunlight and drooped down. Whenever the wind blew, the leaves rustled, creating a pleasant sound.

"I like this place."

Jeong Taeui suddenly said softly. He didn't intend to say it aloud; it just slipped out unconsciously.

Gable turned around, and for the first time, Jeong Taeui saw a faint smile on his lips. But the smile quickly disappeared.

"It's very quiet and peaceful, an excellent place to live."

"Oh."

Jeong Taeui realized without him needing to say it explicitly. This man liked the place too. Jeong Taeui smiled, feeling slightly more at ease.

At that moment, Ilay, who had been silent beside him, suddenly murmured.

"Perfect for a few months of rest or vacation. But being far from the mainland can be inconvenient if you need something immediately."

"But even though it takes a bit of time, there's nothing you can't find here. Besides, Baheb Street—a seaside town on the southern part of the island—hosts a night market in Dar es Salaam once a week. Most surfing enthusiasts go there because of the strong waves. If you go there, you can buy most of what you need."

"A night market?"

"From six or seven in the evening until midnight at Baheb's central square. Besides the commercial market, there's also a space for people to trade various items like at a flea market. Sometimes you can find interesting things, so it's always crowded."

"Haha." - Jeong Taeui nodded and said - "That place must be fun."

After a moment of silence, he asked again.

"Are there many tourists coming to Seringe?"

Gable shook his head.

"Ordinary tourists don't come here often because they usually go to Zanzibar, which is closer to Dar es Salaam. Middle Eastern royalty and wealthy merchants are the ones who frequent this place. They have mansions here and come to relax. From summer to autumn, during this time when the tide rises, there are quite a few young people who like surfing, but only for a short period. After that, there are hardly any tourists."

Jeong Taeui was lost in thought for a moment, then asked softly.

"So, if there are any foreign tourists walking around here at this time, they would be noticed immediately."

Gable did not respond. He merely slowed his pace slightly and then continued walking without a word.

He had mentioned that he couldn't be completely sure if Jeong Jaeui was here or not. If he were here, rumors would have spread if anyone saw such a tourist. If a non-African or non-

Arab person wandered the streets, they would stand out.

"Gathering information around here is useless."

Gable, who had been silent, suddenly spoke. Jeong Taeui didn't reply and continued to listen.

"The area with the villas of the Arab tycoons is farther when you enter Baheb. But it's almost isolated from other parts of the island. Rumors from this place can reach there in no time. But rumors from there will never reach here." Useless.

"Why would my brother be there...?"

"If he's not there, then there's no place left on this earth for Jeong Jaeui."

Gable concluded. Then, taking a step, he moved ahead, leaving them about ten paces behind. Jeong Taeui licked his lips and humbly watched the man's back before murmuring.

"Did I say something to anger him?"

"Huh? Oh. That's just how he is. A bit indifferent."

"...."

Jeong Taeui thought to himself that he wasn't that bad and followed Gable. Then, he suddenly felt someone looking at him. Taeui turned his head and met Ilay's gaze.

"....Huh?"

"You're right."

".....? About what?"

Taeui's forehead wrinkled, and he tilted his head to look at him before asking again. He tried to recall what he had just said but couldn't figure out what Ilay was referring to.

"As you said, foreigners stand out here, especially Asians. If they aren't locked up somewhere, they would be easily spotted."

"Oh? Yeah, right. Hyung, if he's really confined in a mansion and doesn't go outside, what can I do? I won't be able to meet him at all."

Jeong Taeui frowned and muttered to himself. If he knew which villa it was, he would have no qualms about sneaking in at midnight. But he couldn't blend into every villa in that Southeast area. What to do now? Jeong Taeui sighed. His brain couldn't come up with a good solution. It seemed like he should return to his rented room, rest, take a bath, and think carefully about it.

Looking at Taeui scratching his head and saying - "I'll find him somehow," Ilay clicked his tongue.

"If we're talking about standing out, you're the same...."

"Hmm? Ah, right. If there's a rumor about an Asian person wandering around here, it would probably reach my brother, and he would get curious and come out to see.... No way. He's not the kind of person who likes to listen in on everything or has that kind of curiosity."

So he would rather spread the rumor that "An Asian named Jeong Taeui is here" than "An Asian is here."

He said, and Ilay didn't respond.

As Gable had calculated earlier, after two hours of walking, they arrived at the inn. The sun had set, and night had fallen. Opening the wooden door of a house with a large stone wall surrounding it in a dark alley, Gable stood waiting for the two who lagged behind by dozens of steps.

Two hours of walking on the quiet, cool streets were comfortable and pleasant.

He would stay in this place for about a month. Maybe his brother was somewhere on this island, perhaps resting in a quiet and comfortable space like this.

Jeong Taeui smiled. Then he slipped through the wooden door that Gable had opened.

"I feel like I just accidentally stumbled into a tourist spot in a Muslim country."

Jeong Taeui muttered inadvertently.

The accommodation was a small two-story house for backpackers. Though small, everything was fully equipped. In the middle of the first floor was the living room, next to it was a spacious kitchen, and next to that was the laundry room and workroom. He didn't look closely, but it seemed there were a few more rooms at the end of the hallway. And on the second floor, there were three or four rooms with a corridor in the middle.

From the window of the second-floor room, there was a spacious garden planted with fruit trees, next to a swimming pool. Fruit was scattered on the grass, and a hammock swayed in the wind among the trees.

"This place really is for backpackers... I wonder if the inn business here is good because there aren't many tourists. Are there any other guests besides us?"

"Maybe it's been booked entirely. Unless you plan to spread rumors everywhere to find someone."

Jeong Taeui opened the window wide and sat on the window sill. He looked down at the garden and then turned his head when he heard a voice a few steps away. Ilay was also entering.

They were welcomed by a young receptionist named Anna. Perhaps she was even younger than Jeong Taeui. Anna led them upstairs and introduced them to the best rooms with plenty of sunlight. She arranged two rooms next to each other for them. Gable's room was on the first floor.

Perhaps noticing Taeui's confusion at the sight of the young hostess who seemed not yet of age, the girl smiled and said - "I am the owner of this place." Then she winked playfully and went downstairs.

"This street is really quiet. I want to buy a house in a place like this, build an inn, and live leisurely, occasionally hosting guests from near and far."

"Such an old man's hobby."

Jeong Taeui said softly as he sat on the window sill. In response, Ilay's laughter filled the air.

Jeong Taeui turned his head to glare at him. Ilay walked into the bathroom in the room and started undressing as if preparing to take a shower. His room must have a bathroom too, so why was he showering here?

Jeong Taeui tilted his head, but his mood was still very good, so he looked out the window again. Soon, the sound of water flowing softly in the bathroom could be heard.

Jeong Taeui sighed contentedly. He had spent nearly a day getting here from Hong Kong. Even though he hadn't done anything all day but talk, spending an entire day on a plane and then in a car was still quite tiring. But the good thing was he arrived here in the evening. If he rested and slept well, he would easily adjust to the jet lag by the morning.

He liked this island, the island where he would stay for the next month.

Vol 5 - Chapter 15: Ilay, you really like me that much? (18+)

When he was still in Dar es Salaam, Jeong Taeui had already been quite tired. Amid the noise of the crowd, his fatigue multiplied.

But as soon as he set foot on this island and leisurely walked along the quiet and peaceful road, his mind seemed to relax and feel rejuvenated. The curious and well-meaning gazes of the occasional strangers passing by also radiate warmth. Jeong Taeui liked the solemn but oppressive atmosphere characteristic of Islam.

Suddenly, he felt someone watching him. When he looked down, a young black girl came out into the yard with a wooden basket to collect fallen fruits and was looking up at him. Perhaps she was a girl hired to help out here. Although the features of black people were more prominent, it seemed she was of mixed Arab descent. But it didn't appear that she was Muslim, as she was not wearing a headscarf and was dressed in a robe.

If she wasn't a Muslim woman, it wouldn't be dangerous to talk to her. Moreover, the girl was too young to be considered a woman, perhaps only fourteen or fifteen years old.

Jeong Taeui smiled at the cute girl who was looking at him with bright eyes and waved gently. The girl seemed startled, shrank back, quickly picked up the fruits, and hurried into the house. Even so, her gaze up at Taeui was very gentle, it seemed she was just shy.

Jeong Taeui smiled. Maybe she found it quite strange to have a guest in an inn that rarely had visitors? Or perhaps it was because he was a rare Asian.

Jeong Taeui looked away. Outside the fence, small, low, shabby houses were lined up, quietly sinking into the darkness. He was immersed in the dim night, with one or two lights lit outside the window. From somewhere far away, he could hear a foreign language that sounded like a mother calling her child. Wondering if this was the same everywhere in the world, Taeui laughed to himself.

He liked this feeling. It wasn't familiar to him, but he remembered the moment.

And then the sound of water in the bathroom stopped. When he turned his head, Ilay was coming out of the bathroom, drying his hair with a towel.

Jeong Taeui stepped down from the window sill. There were a few insects flying around the room. He thought he should close the window, so he leaned out the window and pulled the door shut. Then he suddenly realized, outside the stone wall, someone was looking in this direction.

The dim darkness limited his vision, and he couldn't see the person clearly. In the corner of the alley, a boy was staring at Jeong Taeui. The boy looked at him as if he were a strange creature. When their eyes met, the boy was startled and quickly turned his head and ran across the small alley.

"...?"

Jeong Taeui scratched his head. What was so strange about an Asian person? Or maybe many people here had never seen an Asian before?

But he didn't think that the boy was just passing by...

Jeong Taeui pondered for a while, and before he could think more about the answer, Ilay came up right behind him.

"It's late, it's so dark. What are you looking at?"

As he finished speaking, the garden below was lit up with three or four small lanterns. Not very bright, but enough to walk around the garden at night.

"Hmmm. It looks nice. I could eat fruit or swim in the pool."

Jeong Taeui nodded with a serious face and turned around, but immediately frowned. He hadn't dried himself properly, so water droplets fell from his body, wetting the floor. His naked body, without even a towel, was exposed shamelessly without a hint of embarrassment.

Jeong Taeui glanced down.

It hadn't risen, almost making his heart drop.

If it had been aroused while showering, it would have been a big problem.

Jeong Taeui turned back and leaned against the window sill. Ilay came beside him and looked outside. He thought to himself that the window sill wasn't very high, so from the outside, one could clearly see him being naked, but he said nothing. After all, he felt very embarrassed (while the person in question didn't seem embarrassed at all).

"I think I heard something running."

Ilay muttered, Taeui bit his lip, and suddenly his spine chilled. He really was a devil. Not only did he have sharp ears, but he was also damned perceptive.

For a moment, he thought of telling him about the black boy who had looked over here in the corner of the alley, but then he decided not to. Something that wouldn't help was better left unsaid.

"Um. I thought I heard something, so I looked, but it was too dark to see anything."

"Hmm...?"

Jeong Taeui pretended not to know and mumbled, thinking that if he said - "I didn't hear anything at all." he might be mocked immediately. Ilay glanced at Jeong Taeui but didn't say much.

"Oh. The girl is back. HELLO—"

Jeong Taeui saw the black girl from earlier returning to the garden with the lights on and waved. The girl was heading towards the back door, her clothes changed, probably having finished her shift and going home. Taeui smiled and waved, this time the girl hesitated and waved back. Then, seemingly embarrassed, she quickly ran out the door.

When Jeong Taeui laughed loudly, Ilay looked down at him with meaningfully narrowed eyes. Jeong Taeui noticed his eyes and asked in surprise - "huh?"

"What's wrong? Isn't it cute?"

"Jeong Taeil, that's the type of woman you like, right?"

"What?"

Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay blankly, his tone became strange. Then, realizing his hidden meaning, Taeui distorted his face.

"Hey, what's her taste in women? That girl looks like she's only 14 or 15 years old. A girl like that... I just find it cute to have a girl walking around working hard like that."

"Even if she has the body of a teenager, her mind will still be like other women. But, you can't be with women."

Jeong Taeui couldn't refute what he said for a moment, he muttered - "Ugh" and then fell silent. He was mostly right, but there was still something that hurt his pride as a man.

"Not liking women doesn't mean I can't handle women. You speak as if I'm incapable."

When Jeong Taeui grumbled, Ilay smirked.

"I know it's not impossible."

A low voice suddenly whispered in his ear. "Uh." Jeong Taeui didn't even have time to think as Ilay's hand gripped his crotch. He recoiled reflexively, the memory of Ilay's delicate hand squeezing him still vividly in his mind.

Ilay chuckled, perhaps noticing the tension on Taeui's face. He leaned in close to his ear, licking the edge, and whispered.

"You don't need to worry so much. I won't touch it without reason."

In other words, if there was a reason, he would definitely make him pay the price. The reason was that Ilay could do anything he wanted as long as he felt like it.

"What are you thinking about? Sitting still on the windowsill while I'm showering?"

Ilay's hand left his crotch and wandered up to his waist, caressing him. He whispered into Taeui's ear, his lips lightly brushing the edge and slowly moving to his cheek, making Taeui let out a small moan - "Um."

Why does this man have such a bad habit? Whenever he sees me, all he can think about is...

Look, when I was at UNHRDO, this bastard treated me like a useful tool for masturbation. Remembering that part of his memory, Jeong Taeui suddenly felt uncomfortable.

"You have a bathroom in your room, so why come to mine and use my shampoo and soap? That's what I was thinking about."

Hearing this, Ilay chuckled.

"I prefer the shampoo and soap in your bathroom. And I also lack patience."

If he didn't have the patience to go back to his own room to shower, then surely he wouldn't have the patience to restrain other desires either.

Jeong Taeui unconsciously recoiled as he felt a hand slip under his shirt, slowly caressing his body from waist to chest. The ticklish sensation spread all over him.

Strange. Initially, he wasn't someone who would do such things, right? Jeong Taeui didn't think Ilay was the type to have intimate actions with others, but why...

But then Taeui quickly concluded that maybe he just didn't know this side of him, and perhaps Ilay had always been like this. After all, he had only seen him with others a few times by chance. And such actions weren't something he could observe in just a few accidental encounters.

"So, do you think you can find Jeong Jaecil?"

Ilay whispered softly into Jeong Taeui's ear. When he tried to turn his head in the opposite direction, Ilay's pale hand gripped his chin, holding it in place. Ilay bit and nibbled at his earlobe as if warning him not to do anything foolish.

As Jeong Taeui dropped his head onto Ilay's shoulder, frowning from the sudden sharp pain, Ilay smiled contentedly and stroked his face with the hand still cupping his cheek.

"Let's see, I don't know. How could I know when I haven't even left this place?"

"Hmm. Twins usually have a special sense... or something like that, right?"

"I don't know about other twins, but we definitely don't have that. By the way, shouldn't we be having dinner?"

Jeong Taeui said softly, trying to push Ilay's shoulder away. But that solid body didn't budge. If only he would let go and step back as if he were just playing with him, but Ilay showed no such signs.

Jeong Taeui calmly stared at the ceiling, then felt something hard beneath Ilay's clothes pressing against his groin.

"...Ilay."

"...Hmm?"

"...Do you really like me that much?"

Ilay's lips, which had been gently placing light kisses on his lips, suddenly paused.

Only after blurting out the question did Jeong Taeui wonder if he was going to get hit. The question seemed like a joke delivered by a clown with a sense of humor just enough to earn a mocking laugh.

Jeong Taeui wanted to maintain the same posture, but his body wasn't stable enough and leaned back slightly. He couldn't see the emotions on Ilay's face as it was too close, but he could feel Ilay's gaze looking down at him.

Just as Taeui thought, in the next moment, a burst of laughter hit his eardrums. Ilay laughed loudly for a long time, and as if in a very good mood, he patted Jeong Taeui's arm lightly as if he had met a good friend in a bar and replied.

"Taeil, you say things I've never heard or thought of in my life. Alright, alright. You've asked that question before, why are you asking it again now... Oh, right. I'll say it if you want to hear it."

"No, I don't want to hear it..."

"Taeil. I like you. I love you. So take it off."

A smile spread across his lips, but those seemingly useless and unlikely words were spoken in an extremely serious tone.

Jeong Taeui tilted his head back slightly and looked up at Ilay as he pulled back enough for him to see his face. Jeong Taeui raised his eyebrows in surprise. He didn't expect to see a faint smile at the corner of his eyes. It might have been an illusion, but those eyes seemed to be smiling gently, making him look like any ordinary person...

But that face, if he didn't manage to take off his clothes now, that ordinary face would turn into a madman's face immediately.

Holding onto his belt buckle, Jeong Taeui had a gloomy expression for a moment. He had only been here for less than three hours. He had just arrived at the inn and unpacked (though he didn't have much stuff) - in less than an hour. Finally reaching his destination after a day of hardship, only to start another round of hardship was too harsh.

Ilay watched intently as Taeui fumbled with his belt buckle with a gloomy face. Taeui leaned against the window frame. Ilay reached out and placed his hand on the sill as if to wrap him in his arms and asked slowly in a low voice.

"Should I ask a similar question? Jeong Taeil. Don't you like it?"

"Huh?"

Jeong Taeui looked at him puzzled, seemingly not understanding his question for a moment. He couldn't think of anything he didn't like temporarily, but in this situation, it had to be one of two things. Either he didn't like him, or he didn't like having sex with him.

"...."

Jeong Taeui once again got lost in his own random thoughts.

'Don't like him' - as soon as he thought of the first answer, it felt like something was boiling inside him. So, what's there to like about this crazy murderer? Besides, he said he could slit his throat anytime and was determined to keep him by his side for life and make him suffer to death.

..... But even when considering those things, he suddenly felt it was funny. He didn't hate this man. Clearly, he hated some of his things, but those things didn't dominate his feelings towards him.

Alright, so the first answer could be ruled out.

So, did he hate having sex with him? As soon as he threw out the second answer, anger surged within him. How could he like that damn thing every time it pierced him? He'd get stabbed once, and the next day he'd be bedridden all day.

But again, if he thought about it, having sex with him wasn't that bad (except when he first put it in). Jeong Taeui was a very simple person; he enjoyed the sexual pleasures it brought. And he was extremely satisfied with Ilay in this aspect, as he always brought him to the peak... Yeah, except for that damn thing.

Jeong Taeui really wanted to scream in frustration that he would enjoy having sex with him if he could cut off half of his penis.

Ilay looked down at Taeui, who was struggling with his thoughts for a moment. Watching him sigh softly, wondering what the answer was, suddenly, the smile disappeared from his face.

"I guess you don't like it. Alright... even if you don't like it, there's no other way."

"Huh?"

Jeong Taeui was stunned before he could properly finish his answer. Ilay's hand tightened and grabbed Jeong Taeui's crotch. It wasn't strong enough to hurt him, but the grip was firmer than before, making the intent clear.

At that moment, Jeong Taeui wondered if this man was really going to put an end to him today.

"Hey!"

Jeong Taeui grabbed Ilay's arm. Ilay just looked at him silently.

"I have to look for my brother tomorrow. I just got here today, and I'm starving. If I end up bedridden all day tomorrow, do you really want me to die?"

However, Ilay only smirked slightly.

"That's your problem."

Jeong Taeui tried to push his arm away with all his strength, but it was undeniable that no matter how much strength he used, he couldn't compete with him, and that made him furious. If he had Ilay's strength, he could have easily broken his arm in a second.

Jeong Taeui suddenly felt drained of all energy, and he let go of his arm.

"Then... at least let's eat something first. I'm about to pass out here. You wouldn't want to do it with someone who's passed out like a corpse, right?"

Jeong Taeui weakly sought a way out. If he starved like this and then got exhausted to the point of being bedridden, he would truly die.

Ilay looked down at Taeui with a hint of amusement in his eyes, then suddenly let go of him and turned around. Jeong Taeui stared at his back in surprise. Of course, he had pleaded, but he never thought Ilay would easily listen to his plea like that. Surprisingly, this man also had a human side.

.....

But before Jeong Taeui could breathe a sigh of relief, Ilay had already gotten on the bed and sat down. Ilay leaned against the wall and spread his legs wide casually. He looked directly at Jeong Taeui, his erection visible under the fabric, just as he had felt earlier.

"Having sex after eating is great, but first, we need to put out this fire."

"Taeil. Come here."

"...."

"Come to think of it, you said you'd do it with your mouth the other day."

Ilay snapped his fingers, calling Taeui. His eyes were fixed on the bulge under Ilay's pants.

Yes, of course, he had said that in a desperate moment, but looking at that thing...

Jeong Taeui stared at it with a gloomy expression, and Ilay's voice rang in his ears again.

"Taeil. Come here."

He looked up and met Ilay's gaze. Those eyes were cold.

Damn it, what's gotten into you now, you bastard. Jeong Taeui muttered under his breath, scratched his head, and walked toward Ilay in despair. Alright, go ahead and use me, I will

definitely, absolutely take the opportunity to escape next time.

"Jeong Taeil, stop thinking about useless things."

Sometimes, Jeong Taeui was scared of this man's frightening sharpness. He wondered if Ilay could actually see through his mind. It was so real it didn't seem like a joke at all. So, he could only obediently sit down in front of him and try to clear his mind as much as possible.

But before he could even try to clear his mind, the swollen bulge in front of him made his brain go blank.

Look at that, this thing... it's definitely a weapon.

Ilay's eyes never left him. He watched Taeui hesitating with a dark expression, then suddenly grabbed his head. He shoved Taeui's face into his crotch roughly. Jeong Taeui lost his balance and fell face-first into his lap. Before he could catch his breath, a hot piece of flesh rubbed against his face.

"It's painfully swollen. I hope you take care of it properly this time. If it's not satisfied correctly, whether you're starving or not, I'll still shove it deep into your hole. Suck it well."

A sharp whispering voice gently spoke.

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue, crazy bastard.

Something like a fierce flame suddenly ignited within him. Jeong Taeui sharply said as he grabbed the protruding shaft with both hands.

" 'I like you or I love you,' don't ever say those words again. Mocking like that is more annoying than being treated this way. If you want to suck, then suck, if you want to lick, then lick. Fine. As you wish."

Jeong Taeui coldly responded to him, then opened his mouth to take in the large penis. Damn it. This thing couldn't even fit in his mouth. No, the moment he put it in his mouth, he regretted it deeply. Even though he had only gotten the head in, it already filled his entire mouth, making it hard to breathe.

Damn it. Damn it. Damn it. Is doing it with my mouth really better than having it inside?

Jeong Taeui broke out in a cold sweat as he managed to get half of it into his mouth. The hot shaft occupied his entire mouth. Should he lick it instead of taking it all in? Jeong Taeui seemed unsure of what to do with just the head in his mouth, so he looked up at Ilay, but his brows immediately furrowed.

This seemed to be the worst situation.

Ilay's cold face looked down at Jeong Taeui. No emotion. He quickly realized that Ilay was in an extremely, extremely terrible mood.

I should be the one feeling terrible, not you. Jeong Taeui felt it was entirely unfair. But before he could do anything, a hand reached out and gently pushed his head down. A muffled groan mixed with his breath escaped his mouth but was blocked by the warm shaft.

"Suck and lick as you wish, huh? Well said, Jeong Taeil. Suck and lick... if you spill even a drop of the cum I shoot today, you'll experience hell, so you'd better make sure to swallow it all."

He wanted to retort that he wanted to see what hell was like, but he couldn't say anything as his mouth was occupied. Ilay held his head and pushed down, the enormous shaft sliding into his throat and starting to thrust. Three thrusts hit his uvula, triggering his gag reflex.

But he couldn't even gag.

He couldn't breathe, he felt like throwing up. Jeong Taeui struggled, but the strong hand holding his head didn't budge. Tears welled up at the corners of his eyes, something he didn't even realize.

"What's wrong? Why isn't your mouth moving? Does it only work when it's sprouting sarcasm, this mouth?"

Ilay's deep, harsh voice echoed in his ears.

At that moment.

"Excuse me." - A knock on the door followed by Gable's voice calling from behind rang out.

In an instant, Jeong Taeui's mind froze, and the hand pressing his head down paused. But immediately after, as if nothing had happened, the hand continued to hold his head, moving it up and down, pushing the shaft deeper into his throat. Jeong Taeui struggled. It was the sheer embarrassment that filled his mind, leaving no room for any other thoughts.

Even so, the hand gripping his head didn't slow down. *Click*, the door quickly opened.

Time seemed to freeze. Jeong Taeui couldn't move, as if he were frozen in place. Only Ilay's hip continued to move, thrusting his erect member into his mouth.

Jeong Taeui felt like he was losing his mind. Ilay's calm voice sounded in his ear.

"Is it urgent?"

After a moment of silence, another calm voice replied, as if nothing special was happening.

"Not urgent. I'll be downstairs. You can come down when you're done."

Then there was another *click*. The door closed.

And that was it. The brief external interruption ended just like that. Gable didn't say anything to Jeong Taeui, nor did he look at him with any harsh or disdainful eyes. It was just a normal

voice, as if nothing had happened. Maybe when he met him later, he would still act as if nothing had happened.

But.

"...—."

Hic Jeong Taeui almost couldn't suppress the sobs rising in his chest. Even though he tried to hold back, the sobs couldn't be heard with his mouth filled by Ilay's large penis.

He was very uncomfortable. No, uncomfortable didn't even begin to cover it.

It was terrifying and painful, as if his whole body were being torn apart. It was an emotion he had never felt before. Too late, Jeong Taeui realized this was the feeling of his pride being wounded.

Although he had nothing to be proud of, he had never thought he had anything like pride. He had never cared about the ego inside him that he needed to protect. But it had always been there.

However, now.

He was lying down like an animal, his head bowed and buried in another man's crotch. His current portrait was truly pathetic.

"...."

Ilay's gaze suddenly lowered, but Jeong Taeui couldn't feel it. Tears welled up at the corners of his eyes, not because he was in an embarrassing situation, but because he was gagging and in pain.

In the midst of that extreme misery, Jeong Taeui couldn't even lift a finger. It was truly a terrible and painful feeling.

"...Taeil."

A deeper voice than usual sounded. But nothing seemed to reach his ears at this moment; his head buzzed, and Jeong Taeui remained motionless.

"Taeil. ...—Taeil!"

Once again, a small, urgent, worried voice called his name. Jeong Taeui looked at him calmly. Their eyes met. Ilay was looking down at him with a very strange emotion. It was an emotion he had never seen on Ilay's face before. He couldn't even name what kind of emotion it was.

But maybe it wasn't much different from Taeui's at this moment. Ilay suddenly frowned and clicked his tongue. Then he let go of the hand holding Taeui's head and pushed him away roughly. Jeong Taeui almost fell off the bed, but Ilay quickly grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

"...."

Jeong Taeui quietly lowered his eyes, feeling downcast, seeing the ugly, grotesque thing still standing in front of him. But soon after, Ilay got up and left the bed.

Walking toward the bathroom without saying a word, he suddenly stopped and yelled in frustration, as if he couldn't stand the anger any longer. After the yell that shook the entire room, he spat out some harsh words in German and went into the bathroom.

And he stayed in the bathroom for a long time, continuously spewing out every curse he could think of. (**Verdammt: Damn it*)

Why was he yelling like that? I'm the one who should be yelling and angry.

Jeong Taeui thought gloomily. But he didn't even feel angry, as his mind was too heavy to make room for anger. Jeong Taeui hugged his knees despondently, watching Ilay's back as he walked into the bathroom without a word.

Ilay was standing in front of the toilet. Taeui couldn't believe his eyes; he was relieving his own desire. Muttering curses as he did so—maybe because of his mood, Jeong Taeui's name sometimes appeared amid the incomprehensible German phrases. After a long time, he looked down and then stopped. The sound of dripping into the toilet echoed intermittently for quite a while.

When Ilay returned and stepped out of the bathroom, his face was fierce. The usual indifference was gone. His eyes had turned blue. He picked up his pants and put them on, glaring at Jeong Taeui with eyes as blue as glass.

Jeong Taeui had seen those eyes before. "I will kill you." - That was what those eyes said. These were not the eyes of a human being, absolutely not. These were the eyes of a ruthless, blood-soaked killer looking at his victim.

"...Alright, this is complicated and troublesome."

He whispered softly. Those green dagger-like eyes looked at Jeong Taeui with a burning intensity.

I will really kill you.

Each second passed slowly, Jeong Taeui felt breathless to the point of pain. After a few minutes, Ilay took a step towards Jeong Taeui, then suddenly stopped. Once again, his face darkened.

"...Damn it."

He muttered a curse and turned around, striding out of the room. Only the sound of the angry door slam was left behind.

Jeong Taeui silently stared at the door, sitting there like a lifeless doll for a moment, then sighed as usual.

"Damn... that was what I was going to say."

"Everything that made me feel good here has been blown away..."

But there was no use in complaining further, so Jeong Taeui got up from the bed. Suddenly, he placed his hand on the corner of his eye. The tears had dried long ago. Earlier, he had been so embarrassed and in pain that the tears had come out on their own.

Jeong Taeui muttered - "Insects can come in if they want." then threw the window wide open. He climbed up on the windowsill and sat down, looking at the desolate garden below and sighed.

It was puzzling. Understanding him now was harder than when he followed him at UNHRDO and witnessed him turning people into pools of blood. At least back then, his actions were consistent, and he could predict how he would react in any situation. But now, he couldn't grasp his emotional fluctuations anymore.

"...But that beastly bastard seemed a bit confused, didn't he...? No, he's not the kind of person who would be like that."

Jeong Taeui rubbed his still aching jaw and caressed his sore throat. He couldn't figure out what wind had caused Ilay to suddenly stop what he was doing and leave like that.

But even so.

"...Ah... I will never forgive you. I can't forgive you."

Jeong Taeui whispered like a sigh. His sudden changes of heart were not new, but this time, it was unforgivable. At least he should have given him some space to maintain a minimum level of dignity.

"How am I supposed to face Gable now..."

Of course, Gable would act like nothing happened, and Jeong Taeui would do the same. But the awkwardness within him would not disappear because of that.

Jeong Taeui frowned and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Ah, I don't know. I don't know. I don't know anything... I don't know anything at all."

In fact, this wasn't the first time he had shown such an embarrassing side - though it wasn't exactly very embarrassing. But what was he supposed to do now?

His pride was hurt not because of Gable. His pride was hurt in front of the man named Ilay RieGrow - the one who had pinned him down in that situation and the way he handled the situation afterward.

"I get it... This is what you want me to endure when I'm with you."

Jeong Taeui muttered bitterly. The strength in the hand gripping his hair also loosened.

"Ah, I don't know..." Jeong Taeui helplessly lamented once more, then looked down at the garden.

At that moment, he could feel someone staring at him.

"...?"

Jeong Taeui turned his head. The gaze came from outside the stone wall. Somewhere beyond the fence, someone was watching him. But Jeong Taeui couldn't see clearly, only a small corner shrouded in darkness. That was where the black boy had stood earlier.

"Is someone there?"

Jeong Taeui threw a question into the air even though he couldn't see anyone. His low voice cut through the quiet garden and reached beyond the wall. But no one replied.

Jeong Taeui was about to say something else but then heard a knock at the door behind him.

"Excuse me." A high-pitched voice came from outside the door. Jeong Taeui responded - "Ah, yes." - and jumped down from the windowsill. The door to the room opened slightly, and the landlady he had met earlier peeked in.

"Aren't you hungry? Come down to the dining room; we have food."

"What? Oh, yes. Thank you."

Jeong Taeui smiled at the invitation and nodded. The landlady smiled brightly and closed the door as she left.

Those words made his hunger return. Jeong Taeui looked at the open window for a moment, then scratched his head and turned toward the door.

He went downstairs, feeling it would be awkward to face Gable or Ilay in the dining room. But they had mentioned they had something to discuss and went to Gable's room. So Jeong Taeui finished his plate clean, lightly patted his full stomach. By the time he returned to his room, Ilay still hadn't shown up.

Jeong Taeui groggily opened his eyes, sighed wearily, and looked at the unfamiliar wallpaper on the ceiling. Before his brain could ask - "Where is this place?" - Taeui already remembered where he was.

Ah. Alright. This is Seringe.

When arriving at a new place, it takes a few days to get used to it. He realized this truth mainly after waking up from a deep sleep on a morning like this.

Jeong Taeui tossed and turned, thinking he would wake up feeling this strange for about three more days. Before closing his eyes again, he suddenly opened them wide when a familiar

face appeared before him.

".....!!!"

His tongue was stiff, which was good. Otherwise, he might have screamed uncontrollably.

Jeong Taeui blinked in surprise and rubbed his heart, which felt like it was about to drop and then beat wildly again for a while. Right in his line of sight was a face sleeping peacefully with eyes closed. It was a face he knew all too well. Not a face with terrifying expressions, but simply an ordinary face. He had seen it many times before. So it wasn't too surprising to suddenly face it. But even so, he was startled enough to nearly jump out of his skin.

When he woke up and opened his eyes, even if he had witnessed him killing someone with blood-red lips, he wouldn't have been surprised. But that wasn't the reality now.

Jeong Taeui fumbled beside the bed and picked up a glass of water. After taking three or four gulps, he felt a bit calmer. He woke up. And the first thing he saw right after opening his eyes in the morning was this face. The face that woke him up and made him immediately alert.

Jeong Taeui put the glass down and looked at his face with a complicated expression.

"...?"

He couldn't describe it. Clearly, he had slept alone in the bed last night. That was natural because this was his room. But when he opened his eyes, this man was lying next to him.

Even though he wasn't as sharp as Ilay, he wasn't a very deep sleeper either... So how on earth did this man manage to climb into his bed without him noticing? No, more than that, why was he squeezing in with him on this bed, leaving his own spacious bed empty?

Jeong Taeui stared at his face for a moment, then got out of bed. His sleepiness had been blown away. Jeong Taeui looked from the wallpaper on the ceiling to the face of the man lying next to him with a dazed mind. He slowly recalled his memories. Then he remembered.

Yes. He remembered that part of his memory. The accumulated resentment from the previous day. Whether anyone came in or not, the heartlessness of pushing him into that desperate situation was clear in his mind, and he fully remembered the resentment he had almost forgotten.

Until he closed his eyes to sleep, he hadn't seen Ilay return. He didn't see him at dinner; he didn't go to his room, and Ilay didn't come to his. So he hadn't seen him since then.

In the end, Jeong Taeui was too tired to be angry at anyone else, so he decided to forget it and go to sleep as usual.

And this was the face he saw right when he woke up.

"...."

Jeong Taeui looked down at the man with a twisted expression. He remembered everything, so let the resentment from yesterday burn again.

Jeong Taeui scratched his head, thinking, but the resentment had been extinguished and couldn't flare up as fiercely as yesterday. Fine. Humans can only harbor grudges against other humans, not against someone from another species like him.

Jeong Taeui sighed. The moment he pulled the blanket off the bed, the man, who was sleeping lightly (sometimes he wondered if he even slept), immediately opened his eyes. His clear eyes, without a trace of sleepiness, looked at Jeong Taeui. It was always like this. This man could be completely alert with cold eyes even right after opening them.

"What time is it?"

"5:30."

Jeong Taeui looked at the clock and answered, and Ilay closed his eyes again and said softly.

"Sleep some more."

"No, I'm awake."

Jeong Taeui got out of bed. Then, Ilay opened his eyes again, watching Taeui get dressed, then reached out from under the blanket and scratched his head. Taeui drained the half-full glass in one gulp.

Ilay sat up and looked at the clock again. And then, as if he remembered something, he said,

"I just remembered, I got a call from your brother yesterday, he sends his regards to you."

"Kyle? ... I'll call him later."

Jeong Taeui mumbled as he put on his t-shirt.

"Yeah." Ilay replied.

Somehow everything felt too normal. Yesterday, this man had acted like he wanted to kill him, looking extremely resentful and furious when he left the room.

Jeong Taeui glanced at Ilay. The indifferent expression on his face was the same as usual. As if nothing had happened. Ilay got up as well. He stood up and went into the bathroom. The sound of water running from the shower could be heard. Jeong Taeui thought to himself that he was using his shampoo and soap again, but he just sighed, shrugged, and quietly left the room.

He felt a bit suffocated. In the end, whether he was angry or disappointed, it didn't matter to Ilay. Seeing such an indifferent attitude, he lost all energy to be angry.

Yes. That's the relationship between people. They can only accumulate good things with each other... It seemed he had never had any good memories with him at all.

Vol 5 - Chapter 16: I don't hate him

Jeong Taeui sighed and went downstairs. The living room lights were already on, indicating that the landlady was awake. The girl walked to the front door, glanced through the glass into the living room, then opened a drawer and took out a notebook. She smiled brightly when she saw Jeong Taeui and exchanged a few greetings with him.

It seemed she wasn't the only one awake. There were sounds of doors opening and closing in the hallway, followed by footsteps heading toward the bathroom in the back. It seemed the rooms on the first floor didn't have private bathrooms, and the person who just woke up was probably Gable.

Such diligent people. Jeong Taeui admired them silently as he opened the front door and stepped outside.

A gloomy day. The sky wasn't too overcast, but there was no sign of the sun, probably because of the fog. The dew-soaked grass brushed lightly against his sandals, wetting his toes. Jeong Taeui walked into the garden, enjoying the rustling grass beneath his feet. The pleasant stillness of early dawn filled the air. Somewhere in the distance, the weak creak of a door hinge echoed. Was that the sound of the eldest son of a family heading to work early in the morning?

Jeong Taeui approached the hammock strung between the fruit trees. The hammock was loosely woven with thin straw, looking fragile as if it might break at any moment, but it was actually much sturdier than it appeared. Jeong Taeui lay on it but immediately froze because the hammock was soaked with night dew, making the seat of his pants wet.

What the heck!!! Jeong Taeui quickly brushed off his damp pants, but it was too late. In the end, he gave up on brushing his pants and sat back down on the hammock, picking up an overripe mango that had fallen at his feet. Taeui swung the hammock like a rocking chair and bit into the mango.

A peaceful and quiet morning. Occasionally, someone in the house would wake up and walk around, the sound drifting across the still garden.

Jeong Taeui's mood naturally improved. In this peaceful yet unpredictable place, a new day was about to begin.

Jeong Taeui lay on the hammock. Not only his hips but also his back, waist, and head were wet, but he didn't mind. Above him was the clear dawn sky.

Even the buzzing of insects near his ears was pleasant now. There were footsteps approaching from the other side of the road outside the gate. The sound stopped in front of the house. Click, the old wooden door slowly opened with a creak. And then a familiar girl stepped in. It was the young black girl working in the house whom he had seen last night while looking down at the garden from the second floor.

She walked in, her chest heaving as if she had run here. She suddenly froze when she saw Jeong Taeui lying on the hammock with a mango in his mouth. Soon, her eyes showed a hint of shyness.

Jeong Taeui sat up. Finding her hesitation endearing, he smiled and motioned for her to come closer. Taeui wondered if she would startle and run into the house like the day before, but despite hesitating slightly, she cautiously approached him. After taking four or five steps, she paused again. Jeong Taeui motioned for her to come closer, and she took another step before stopping.

Those unfamiliar, shy, but bright and lovely eyes looked like those of a little sister. Jeong Taeui picked up a ripe mango that had fallen nearby, brushed off the dirt, wiped it on his pants to clean it, and handed it to her. She frowned slightly but still accepted the mango from him.

"You're here early."

Jeong Taeui said with a smile, but it seemed she didn't understand. How awkward.

"Live nearby? Home."

This time Taeui spoke slower with simpler words, and it seemed she understood. No, to be precise, she understood one simple word in his sentence. "Nearby," she pointed past the fence and stammered. Maybe her house was in that direction. Jeong Taeui smiled and nodded.

"Breakfast? Morning meal? Food?"

She tilted her head, looking confused, so Jeong Taeui mimed eating. The girl nodded with a bright face.

If he had a little sister, would it feel like this?

Jeong Taeui thought, looking at the girl with an age gap, since he only had an older brother. He couldn't help but say a few more words to her. Even if they didn't understand each other's language, gestures were a simple and effective way to communicate.

The girl smiled shyly but warmly at Jeong Taeui, and he smiled back. It felt good to talk to her like this, and it was easy because her emotions seemed to be written all over her face.

When Taeui was about to say more, the front door opened. Gable slowly walked in. He saw Jeong Taeui and the girl and said something to her that Taeui couldn't understand. The girl responded with a smile, waved gently at Taeui, and hurried into the house.

Gable passed by her, stood on the porch for a moment, and then slowly walked into the garden. Jeong Taeui held a wrinkled mango in his hand after sucking out all the juicy flesh. Gable approached and sat on a wooden chair by the pool, and Jeong Taeui asked in lieu of a greeting.

"Do you want one?"

Gable shook his head. Jeong Taeui made a sound of acknowledgment in his throat and continued sucking on his mango.

The moments of awkward silence passed slowly.

Although Jeong Taeui usually didn't feel uncomfortable or embarrassed being silent with someone, this time, it felt like there were pins under the hammock he was sitting on. He finally finished the mango, leaving nothing more to eat, and glanced at Gable. Even with just a side view, it was enough to gauge his emotions.

It was still that cold, emotionless face. Just like what he saw yesterday. It wasn't an unpleasant face, but it reminded him of the friendly smile he had seen Gable give the girl earlier. In fact, he had seen Gable smile briefly yesterday, which had surprised him or rather caught him off guard. He hadn't expected someone with such an emotionless face to have that side.

When he smiled, he was easier to talk to, and much more handsome. Jeong Taeui inadvertently voiced his thoughts.

"You look much more approachable when you smile."

Gable looked at Jeong Taeui, thought for a moment, then spoke.

"It's hard because many things will look down on me when I smile."

"...."

No. His nature when smiling seemed friendly and kind, but that didn't mean he should be looked down on for it. But thinking back, if he had worked with James (though Jeong Taeui didn't know his exact age), he must have joined T&R at a very young age. He might have been treated condescendingly because of his age at times.

Jeong Taeui nodded, contemplating the painful past this man might have endured. Suddenly, something flew right in front of his eyes. Jeong Taeui reflexively caught it - it was a ripe yellow mango. ***Pop*** The mango in his hand split open, juice dripping all over.

"You can eat any ripe fallen mango and leave the seed by the tree."

Gable said curtly. Jeong Taeui looked at the round mango he had thrown over and smiled. "Thanks." he said, then bit into the fresh mango.

"Rieg..."

Gable started to say something, but when he mentioned that ugly name, he stopped. Just for a moment, the delicious taste of the mango vanished. Jeong Taeui hesitated with a piece of mango still in his mouth.

He had forgotten. Gable had seen everything yesterday.

Jeong Taeui tried to suppress those memories from resurfacing.

"He's taking a shower, so he'll probably be out of the room soon. If you have something urgent, you can come to my room."

"No, I don't have anything urgent. But... do you mean he's in your room, Taeil?"

"Huh? Oh... yes. The shampoo and soap in my bathroom are fresher."

Offering an explanation that even he found strange, Jeong Taeui sucked on the mango. The soft, golden flesh spread sweetly in his mouth.

Gable's curious gaze lingered. After all, the reason for the 'freshness' of the shampoo and soap sounded bizarre. But Taeui wanted to remind him that those words had come from Ilay, not him. So he added.

"Ilay said so."

Thinking that he couldn't bear to be wrongly accused, Gable nodded. Now there were no strange looks directed at him, and the name Ilay didn't come up again in their conversation.

Yes, it was a topic better left untouched.

Jeong Taeui sighed softly, thinking about the man named Ilay RieGrow. There was nothing good to say about him other than to gossip and speak ill behind his back. Jeong Taeui turned his head.

"By the way, do you know what kind of person the wealthy Middle Eastern man holding my brother captive is?"

Come to think of it, they had said that the man in front of him had found clues about Jeong Jaeui's whereabouts and where he had gone. Jeong Taeui had very little information about it. All he knew was that someone in the Middle East seemed to be holding his brother captive in his villa on this island.

Even though Jeong Taeui was Jeong Jaeui's younger brother, to them, he was just an outsider. Nevertheless, Gable answered without any reluctance.

"There's a man named Abdul Rahman Abid Al Saud. Do you know him?"

Jeong Taeui searched his memory, but then immediately shook his head. He didn't know anyone from Arabia to begin with. If he had heard about it, it would have been just fleeting news in the media, and he couldn't remember any of those long and unfamiliar names.

"Then do you know Al-Faisal?"

Gable asked again, and Jeong Taeui still shook his head. Gable looked at him, shook his head too, and said,

"Currently, the Foreign Minister of Arabia is Prince Bandar Al Fahd. He's very shrewd but has been in poor health since birth. Because of this, Prince Rashid and Prince Ali have been contending for that position. Prince Al-Faisal is Ali's son. Al-Faisal has a half-brother, and

their relationship is quite close. He decided early on to leave the power struggle and focus on business...."

Gable was speaking slowly, but he suddenly fell silent. He realized that Jeong Taeui seemed to be struggling to follow the convoluted relationships and complicated family tree. Although Jeong Taeui looked attentive, his brows had been furrowed for a while.

Gable was quiet for a moment, then spoke concisely.

"Al-Faisal is the guardian of his late half-brother's only son, Abdul Rahman. Rahman has been sickly since birth and rarely appears in public. Sometimes, he accompanies Al-Faisal to important family events."

"Ah...."

Jeong Taeui elongated his response, not fully understanding but getting the gist of it...

"So it seems he got involved in the power struggle with his other siblings."

"To be honest, that's correct. The Middle East is very sensitive regarding weapons, both internally and with external forces, so anyone with the support of a researcher like Jeong Jaeui would certainly have a significant advantage."

"...."

Jeong Taeui removed the mango from his mouth. He had lost his appetite.

How wonderful. His brother was suffering because of getting involved in a power struggle within an international organization, and now his other brother was being held captive after being dragged into a power struggle within a foreign royal family. How splendid it was to see siblings sticking together in such a way.

His sense of taste turned bitter. Jeong Taeui threw the mango peel into a small trash bin nearby and wiped the mango juice from his lips with his thumb.

"So that's why he's being held in that royal villa."

"I'm not sure, but it's highly likely."

Jeong Taeui scratched his head. Although he was also being held in a sense, he didn't understand why his brother was involved in something so absurd. In hindsight, even his own situation wasn't easy.

"When I followed my uncle to UNHRDO, I never thought I'd meet Ilay RieGrow, that bastard."

Jeong Taeui sighed, thinking, "I didn't even know there was a man like him in this world."

Gable looked at the fruit trees across the garden and suddenly asked,

"If you're Jeong Jaeui's brother, then Officer Jeong Changin must be your uncle."

"Ah...—Yes, that's right. Do you know my uncle?"

"No. But he's close to the boss, so he occasionally visits us, and I've seen him a few times... —Did you meet Rieg through UNHRDO, or was it through the introduction of the boss or Officer Jeong Changin?"

"Ah. It was through UNHRDO."

UNHRDO, the place so many people in this world aspired to be part of, became the beginning of his misfortune. Jeong Taeui gazed at the sky with distant eyes.

Thinking back, the man's question seemed foolish. There would never be a situation where Kyle or Jeong Changin would introduce Ilay to Jeong Taeui. If they ever did, they should be prepared to hear his grievances for the rest of their lives.

Jeong Taeui looked at Gable and thought. Gable nodded with an indifferent expression, leaving Jeong Taeui unsure of what he was thinking. Jeong Taeui asked with a strange smile.

"It's surprising that you're curious about this. I thought you wouldn't be interested in other people's affairs."

After speaking, he realized it might sound sarcastic, so he quickly added, "Oh, I don't mean any offense. It's just genuinely surprising."

Gable was very reserved and seemed indifferent, so Jeong Taeui didn't think he would care about other people's matters. Gable remained silent with a sympathetic look and then shrugged.

"I apologize. I didn't mean anything by it. But Rieg...- He's not the type to get along with others, so I found it strange."

Jeong Taeui fell into deep thought. He couldn't respond immediately because there was too much to consider in what Gable had said.

This man was like Kyle in a way. He spoke very casually about the man named Ilay RieGrow. Clearly, Ilay wasn't just "not the type to get along with others." By saying that, Gable seemed to imply that Jeong Taeui got along well with Ilay RieGrow.

...Or was he talking about "getting along" in a sexual sense? Given what had happened yesterday, it could be interpreted that way. But even if he tried to explain it that way, it felt forced.

Even if Gable didn't mean 'getting along' with everyone, Jeong Taeui couldn't think of anyone else in the world who was as straightforward about sex as Ilay.

Jeong Taeui seriously contemplated the two seemingly simple but incredibly complex words from Gable for a while but couldn't come to any conclusion. So he gave up trying to understand and spoke with a sigh.

"Well... he's not sociable, but he's not that bad."

Half sincere, half pretending, Jeong Taeui tried to reflect on what he had just said. Yes, he wasn't lying. Ilay always knew how to attract others when he wanted to – although there were issues with his methods, and he had many issues with his personality, Jeong Taeui didn't think it was entirely bad.

Gable nodded indifferently at Jeong Taeui's words.

"Yes, even a serial killer usually has at least one person who mourns them when they die."

"...."

Jeong Taeui looked at Gable with a somber expression for a moment, but Gable's face remained impassive, as if he didn't care about what he had just said.

"Ha... It seems like your relationship with Ilay isn't very good."

Jeong Taeui smiled and asked, but Gable just shrugged indifferently, as if to suggest that it was better not to talk much about this matter.

Gable might be an unusual person. But aside from the context of the conversation, what he said wasn't entirely wrong. Even if Ilay was a serial killer condemned by the whole world, or even if he was a savage criminal or a traitor, or even a ruthless Nazi figure who massacred millions, there would still be someone who, knowing all that, would still pity him. There would be someone like that... for example... someone like Jeong Taeui who would always treat him the same no matter where he was or what he did.

Even a man like Ilay Riegrow, when the whole world knows what he's like, would ultimately have at least one person willing to comfort him. He was clearly a bad guy, but somehow, Jeong Taeui didn't hate that man.

"....Hmm....?"

Jeong Taeui suddenly tilted his head. For a moment, an invisible thought passed through his mind, but when he turned around, it had vanished without a trace. What was it?

A thought appeared in his mind, making his heart flutter, but he couldn't grasp it. Jeong Taeui rubbed the wrinkle between his brows and thought, "mmm."

But before he could ponder what had just appeared, someone interrupted his train of thought.

"What interesting conversation are you two having?"

A cold, deep voice came from the front door. A voice he didn't need to turn around to recognize, slowly making its way toward them.

Vol 5 - Chapter 17: Yesterday... I was wrong. I'm sorry.

Jeong Taeui didn't turn around but glanced over at him. Ilay was wearing only pants, his upper body bare. He walked over slowly, hands in his pockets. Ilay looked at Gable, then at Jeong Taeui, and sat down on the bench next to him.

"I think I heard my name...?"

Ilay said slowly. Before Jeong Taeui could respond, Gable answered with an expressionless face.

"I was just asking how the two of you met, but he didn't say much."

"Oh, really? That's a big deal. But Gable, you started a conversation with him first? So you like him, don't you?"

Gable remained silent, seemingly lost in thought instead of affirming. After a few seconds, Gable shook his head.

"I think it's better to know the basic information about the person I'll be working with, that's all."

Gable emphasized the words "that's all" and paused before adding.

"Besides, it's not unusual for me to be here at this time."

Ilay looked at Gable, then glanced at the pool a few steps away and nodded.

"Alright... It seems you still swim in the mornings. Did Nana and Taeil interrupt you? Don't worry about them and enjoy your swim."

"No, you two go ahead and talk. There's a beach ten minutes away, I'll go there. So if Anna looks for me, please let her know."

Gable immediately stood up and walked away, not towards the gate but around the pool and into the garden, following a small path hidden behind the bushes. Jeong Taeui stared blankly, thinking - "Is there a separate gate there too?"

"It seems he really likes swimming."

"I often see him at the pool early in the morning, unless there's something special going on."

Ilay said vaguely. Jeong Taeui nodded and looked at Gable again. His figure gradually disappeared from his sight.

"Swimming... He looks slim but has a great physique. Is it because he exercises diligently?"

Jeong Taeui murmured, and Ilay, beside him, smiled.

"When he was in the military or even at UNHRDO, there were probably very few people he encountered who didn't exercise."

Thinking about it, yes - "but..." - Jeong Taeui tilted his head in doubt. Although he agreed with Ilay, his perspective was slightly different.

"No, not everyone who exercises has a body like that."

In fact, if you think about it, swimming might not be very useful for training to have a great physique. Among Jeong Taeui's friends, one guy even reached the national swimming championship, and although he had a well-built body, it didn't look as slim and beautiful as Gable's.

Jeong Taeui got lost in memories of his friend who always flaunted his muscles and suddenly turned his head back.

Ilay was sitting relaxed, his hands draped over the back of the bench, looking towards the pool. No, to be precise, he wasn't looking at anything specific; he was just staring aimlessly.

This man also had a beautiful body. Jeong Taeui had thought so, but more than that, it wasn't just the body of an ordinary person. His hands and feet were soft, and sometimes Jeong Taeui suddenly felt that the lines of his ears and jaw were just as delicate.

Whenever he had such thoughts, Taeui felt it was a pity about Ilay's personality.

Jeong Taeui sighed and shook his head. It was unlucky that he had to face Ilay's bad habits every day.

When would he be free? When time passed and this man's persistent grudge faded, could he go somewhere else? No, considering Ilay's personality, he could only conclude that if one day Ilay found tormenting him too boring, he would directly kill him.

... ...That was the reality.

Jeong Taeui became horrified by his own thoughts and rubbed his arms as goosebumps formed.

At that moment, Ilay, who had been staring indifferently at the grass, suddenly spoke up.

"Don't go anywhere you like, Jeong Taeil."

He turned to look at him and said.

"Don't think about going out alone without saying anything."

Jeong Taeui frowned and vaguely replied.

"Even if I tried to escape this tiny island, I'd be caught in no time."

If he were to escape, he would plan it thoroughly and aim for a certain opportunity, perhaps even leaving a note saying - "Don't look for me." to annoy Ilay.

But Jeong Taeui's meaningless words seemed to make Ilay understand it differently. "Ha," Ilay just looked at him.

"You're thinking about running away again. You've thought about it once more."

"....."

Wasn't that what he said before? Jeong Taeui blinked with a crooked smile. Damn it. He had made a mistake again.

This man wanted to corner him, right? Jeong Taeui sneaked a glance at Ilay, who quietly tapped the back of the bench. It seemed his fingers were contemplating something, and after finishing that thought, nothing good would come to Jeong Taeui.

"Let me ask you something."

His fingers stopped tapping, and his deep voice spoke slowly. Jeong Taeui frowned. See, this was it. There was no reason to ask such a vague question here.

"Well... I wish I could answer. What is it?"

"Why do you want to run away?"

Jeong Taeui immediately shut his mouth and stared at Ilay.

His voice remained indifferent as if he didn't care about Jeong Taeui's answer. His gaze was fixed on the clear water of the pool.

Jeong Taeui suddenly felt confused, not knowing what Ilay was getting at. He couldn't answer right away.

The reason he wanted to run away? If he voiced it, a string of negative words would come out, but Ilay... he wasn't the type to care why someone wanted to run away from him. To him, if someone didn't like being around him, they could just leave without him caring about their reasons.

"If it were you, wouldn't you run away?"

Jeong Taeui finally stopped worrying about his random thoughts and lay down on the hammock. But he received an even more terrifying response.

"If it were me, I wouldn't run away. I never bet on something I can't win from the start."

Yes, if you want to run away, go ahead and try. He can catch you anytime. That's what he meant, right? Jeong Taeui bitterly licked his lips, feeling it was a very blatant warning.

But just when he thought the conversation had ended, Ilay spoke again after a while.

"Tell me. The reason you want to run away."

"...I can't say because I don't know."

"I'm thinking of a few reasons why you might want to leave, but I'm trying to find out which one it is."

Jeong Taeui looked up at the sky, with Ilay's resentful voice echoing in his ears. The sun was gradually rising, the morning mist seemed to be dissipating, leaving a bright blue sky.

The reason to run away?

It would be better if he could figure it out himself, but clearly, this man was determined to wait for an answer from him.

"What, do you want to hear me curse you?.... Oh, it's because I don't want to be dragged into trouble by your name and end up dead somewhere if I stay near you."

Jeong Taeui grumbled in reply. His words were half-joking, half-serious, but that was just one of the most basic reasons. He didn't know how he would die. If he made a mistake, he could die at this man's hands, or he could die by being shot by someone attacking Ilay, or he could die at the hands of someone else while trying to escape from him. There were many reasons for his death, but only one conclusion: it seemed he would never die for a reason of his own making.

"Okay... preserving one's life is, of course, the most important issue. And?"

"And what?"

"If that's all, why do you want to run away from me?"

He still asked indifferently, as if he didn't care about the answer. Ilay started tapping his fingers on the back of the bench again. He seemed to be lost in thought once more. Jeong Taeui frowned at those fingers, not knowing what they were thinking.

"I really..." Jeong Taeui paused and sat up. He scratched his head and bit his lip in frustration.

"The things in the past, tying you up, beating you, obviously I can't do that again – You said it yourself, preserving my life is most important. Look, in a situation as bad as this, striving to live in a more comfortable environment is natural, right? Not just humans, even animals would do the same."

"What's the current situation like? Are there many issues?"

Jeong Taeui looked up fiercely at Ilay. When would he get the chance to rip that calm and composed mouth off?

"Ilay. Ilay RieGrow. You said it before. You said you would kill me when you found me. Even if you're not killing me now, you said you'd make me suffer for the rest of my life. What idiot would want to live in misery for the rest of their life?"

Even if there was such a person, it wasn't him.

Jeong Taeui felt that revealing his true feelings at this moment wasn't wise at all. But Ilay couldn't deny the things he had actually said in the past. On the contrary, it was even stranger for Ilay to ask him such a question.

"Torture you for the rest of your life...? Ah, right. You did say you hated being by my side terribly."

A fleeting look of confusion crossed Ilay's face at Jeong Taeui's answer. But then he nodded as if remembering something. His tapping fingers on the bench suddenly added a bit of force.

"Then let's ask again. Why don't you like it?"

"Huh?"

Jeong Taeui's brows furrowed as he stared at Ilay. Why was he asking such difficult questions today? Normally, he could have easily answered, but the way it was asked so naturally made Taeui realize he had never seriously thought about it.

He was still looking at the grass with a weary expression. He seemed, in some way, less alert than usual. Even when he had just woken up, Jeong Taeui had never seen him this unfocused.

"I've thought about it, Taeil. I've never really harmed you."

Jeong Taeui had no choice but to widen his eyes. This man didn't even realize that harming someone didn't necessarily mean killing them. If not, how could he say such a thing? Above all, if Jeong Taeui hadn't been a bit more aware and protective of himself, he would have been dead long ago.

Seeing Jeong Taeui frown without replying, Ilay seemed to understand his thoughts from his silence. He thought for a moment, then spoke.

"However, I could have almost done it."

Jeong Taeui scratched his head. How on earth could this man say such things? Although his words were strange and made him think for a while, one thing was certain.

"Obviously, when I'm around you, bad things always happen, every day."

Jeong Taeui muttered. Just yesterday. The way he acted without regard for anyone. Maybe it was the first time he felt his heart being torn apart so intensely.

He couldn't expect basic humane treatment from this man, and he couldn't stay with someone like that for long. It was disrespectful to himself.

"People have different emotions - a bit different from you - but the most important thing is to control their own emotions. That's the foundation of each person's life, so at the very least, that shouldn't be shaken."

But for this man, it wasn't the case.

Thinking back, Jeong Taeui realized he had grown up in a very beneficial environment. And he was aware of that himself.

At first, he didn't realize it because he lived in a typical home like any other family. There was nothing special about his family, except that he had an extraordinary brother. So he thought everyone was like that.

But soon, he realized how precious and grateful it was for a person to grow up and receive complete love from their parents and siblings.

"Thanks to my parents, I can maintain the personality of a saint even when next to a man like this... Thank you, Mom and Dad."

Jeong Taeui whispered to himself and bowed to his deceased parents. And he thought, since he already had a good personality, could he get a bit more luck? After all, he needed to live a bit too.

"So. You can't control your emotions when you're with me?"

Ilay suddenly asked. Jeong Taeui stopped his 'conversation' with his parents.

"It's not that I can't control them, but it happens beyond my will..."

Jeong Taeui paused and closed his mouth.

Why was this man asking such questions early in the morning? Moreover, they were all very difficult for him to answer. He didn't even know how to answer them properly.

Jeong Taeui scratched his head again and glanced at Ilay. As usual, his face was hard to read. When he sat there so resolutely, it was impossible to guess what he was thinking.

Why did he hate this man? He wondered if anyone else in his past life had started a conversation with such a question. And, of course, no one had.

But this man was wrong from the start. It wasn't that he took the wrong direction; he was wrong from the very beginning.

Jeong Taeui lay back down on the hammock. The morning was bright but not too cold, and he thought he could fall asleep again like this. If this man wasn't here, maybe he could close his eyes and kill some time with a nap.

"But you're wrong. The things people say can vary greatly depending on who they come from. Sometimes I hate being around you, but I never said I didn't like you..."

Jeong Taeui spoke unconsciously, voicing his true feelings. Maybe after hearing this, Ilay would ask - "Why don't you like being with me?" again....

"If there's a reason why you don't like being with me, what is it?"

"..."

Jeong Taeui turned his head on the hammock to look at Ilay. He wasn't even looking in this direction, just staring at the grass.

"Why are you asking when you don't even care what I think or feel? It's just my wish, it doesn't matter."

"Tell me."

"Look, even now. You don't even realize I have my own thoughts. Who could be happy in an unequal relationship?"

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue. Anyway, this man wouldn't understand. Ilay RieGrow wasn't stupid or dumb. From the start, he had lived rationally, clearly understanding everything - and he knew his own nature very well. But Jeong Taeui didn't understand why he kept repeating such questions.

Then, for the first time, Ilay turned his eyes towards Jeong Taeui. Shifting his indifferent gaze from the grass to him. For the first time, Jeong Taeui saw a strange emotion flash across his slightly frowning face.

"Jeong Taeil. The one who decides whether you and others are equal or not isn't someone else but yourself. I've never thought you were unequal to me."

"Right. Keep holding on to that thought. If you think back about it now, even about yesterday..."

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue and spoke. Yes, yesterday too, precisely just a few hours ago.

Ilay didn't say anything. He just stared at Jeong Taeui in silence. But Jeong Taeui couldn't read whether that gaze was positive, negative, or something else. In any case, he had no intention of trying to convince or explain to this man what equality in human relationships meant.

This peaceful morning had been completely shattered.

"Yesterday,..."

Suddenly, Ilay opened his mouth but then fell silent. A strange sensation ran down Jeong Taeui's spine. He wasn't sure if he was getting sleepy again. He glanced at the overcast sky gradually brightening, then closed his eyes.

But thinking about it made him irritated once more.

Yesterday, or rather - just a few hours ago, he had tried to bury that memory once. Why dig it up again? Why treat him so inhumanely?

Jeong Taeui closed his eyes and mouth, thinking that if Ilay ever requested something similar again, he wouldn't hesitate to say - "I hate this."

"Yesterday,..... I was wrong. I'm sorry."

In that moment.

Along with a sigh, those strange words entered his ears. Jeong Taeui's eyes widened, and he instinctively directed his blank, doll-like eyes toward Ilay.

What the hell did he just hear? Jeong Taeui thought he must have misheard something. It was as if those words were in a strange language he couldn't understand. There was nothing wrong with the content of each word, nothing wrong with Ilay's voice, but the serious problem here was the connection between the content and the person saying it. Or maybe the problem was just with his ears.

Jeong Taeui turned to look at Ilay with suspicion. Ilay was gazing indifferently at the fruit trees across the garden. His expression was the same as always.

Jeong Taeui blinked for a long time, unable to stop staring at Ilay in bewilderment, even sitting up.

"..."

Jeong Taeui kept staring at him with a dazed look, as if he had just woken up, and ruffled his hair that had been rubbed by the hammock.

....He must have misheard, right? He definitely misheard. No, even if the world were ending, this man would never say such things. Yesterday, he was pretty angry, so he's hearing such absurd things now, isn't he? Or maybe he's just too tired these days.

Jeong Taeui tilted his head and looked at Ilay, blinking. Seeing him sitting there as if nothing had happened, he doubted himself again whether he really misheard.

What was that? It was an illusion. Surely.

Jeong Taeui licked his lips, sighed, and lay back down. It felt like he had just experienced a very strange hallucination. Maybe because he woke up early today, he might end up falling asleep again without realizing it.

Jeong Taeui looked up at the sky. It was no longer overcast; today was a clear day. It felt like a waste to go back to sleep on such a beautiful morning, but enjoying the waste could also be considered enjoying leisure time. Moreover, who knows? If he fell asleep here, would he hear strange hallucinations like he just did?

Jeong Taeui sighed and closed his eyes. Fortunately, Ilay didn't say anything more. Ever since he came out here, he had only been saying strange things. Maybe everything that just happened was just a dream.

Jeong Taeui closed his eyes, and even though he had just woken up, he felt like he could fall back asleep. He quickly fell into a near-unconscious state, but the feeling of being stared at interrupted him.

He could feel that gaze. If he opened his eyes right now, he would probably meet Ilay's eyes staring at him. Jeong Taeui couldn't help but mind that gaze, wondering if he should avoid it.

Rustle

A sound of footsteps stepping on the grass approached him slowly and finally stopped next to Jeong Taeui.

It seemed like Ilay was intent on disturbing his early morning nap. Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue and opened his eyes.

"What's wrong with you again...."

But Jeong Taeui didn't finish his sentence.

Ilay looked down at Jeong Taeui, who frowned with his eyes closed, showing his annoyance. Then, suddenly, Ilay grabbed his collar and easily pulled him up from the hammock.

Jeong Taeui raised an eyebrow, feeling his upper body suddenly suspended in mid-air. "What now..." - Jeong Taeui tried to grumble.

But before he could, Ilay's tongue filled his mouth.

"...—?"

Taeui didn't even have time to say anything. One of Ilay's hands cradled his cheek and ear, while the other held onto his collar, and then Ilay bent down and gave him a deep kiss.

To be precise, it wasn't a gentle kiss at all; his tongue explored his mouth as if trying to devour him. Jeong Taeui struggled to breathe. From his tongue, teeth, to his lips, Ilay's relentless probing left him unable to voice any protests.

"Ilay." - Jeong Taeui tried to call his name, but even those words were swallowed.

"Ya... Ilay,... I can't breathe."

Jeong Taeui wanted to tell him to ease up because he was suffocating, but he couldn't utter a single word. Yet somehow, Ilay seemed to understand his thoughts.

Was it because he had swallowed all those words, making him understand???

Just when Jeong Taeui was about to pass out from lack of air, with his eyes already covered in a thin layer of haze, Ilay threw him back onto the hammock. Jeong Taeui coughed and tried to catch his breath, looking up at him.

Standing by the hammock, Ilay looked down at Jeong Taeui. But the moment their eyes met, Ilay's brows seemed to knit together. He immediately turned away and walked toward the house.

"...—."

Jeong Taeui grasped his collar, trying to regain his breath, staring blankly at Ilay's retreating figure. Ilay stepped inside and disappeared into the house.

"...?!....--"

Jeong Taeui blinked at the closed door, then looked up at the sky, then down at the ground. Finally, he fixed his gaze on the closed door. Ilay had completely disappeared behind it.

Jeong Taeui lowered his head and rubbed his lips as if trying to tear them off. His fingertips were wet. Their mixed saliva made it hard to tell whose was whose, sticking to his fingers.

This was the first time Ilay had kissed him like that.

To be precise, this was the first time Ilay had kissed him without anything happening afterward. Had he ever spoken about strange questions and unrelated matters, then suddenly kissed him and disappeared like this? No, Jeong Taeui didn't think there had ever been such an instance.

"Uh....."

A trace of confusion appeared on Jeong Taeui's face.

"Yesterday... I was wrong. I'm sorry."

"That, that... Did I really not mishear that...?"

Jeong Taeui covered his face with his hand.

"Um, ugh..."

He muttered some meaningless words. No way. Ilay couldn't possibly show his human side to him like that. That surely wasn't his intention. He shouldn't suddenly reveal a human side of himself with those words. Impossible.

Vol 5 - Chapter 18: Vibration

Jeong Taeui held his face with both hands. His neck was flushed, and the redness spread to his ears and cheeks, making his whole face burn. His entire body was covered in a perfect shade of red.

Jeong Taeui got up from the hammock and walked away. He ran to the pool and dunked his head into it, the cold water quickly enveloping his face and neck.

Gurgle gurgle

Bubbles rose to the surface. Jeong Taeui couldn't breathe, but even with his face submerged in the cold water, his body temperature didn't decrease at all. He wondered if the pool water had heated up.

Impossible.

"....Phew...—!"

Only when he was about to suffocate did Jeong Taeui lift his face from the water. His face was still burning hot, and he rubbed it with his hands. His head felt like it was being illuminated by a bright, glaring light. Some things that he couldn't understand before seemed to be connected. It was as if he could see a hint of the starting point of connections that had been buried in darkness for a long time.

"He, no way... could it be, could I..."

"...What are you doing?"

Jeong Taeui muttered to himself in astonishment, and a shoe appeared within his sight. Jeong Taeui looked up and saw Gable standing a few steps away. Perhaps Gable had just returned from the beach; he looked down at Jeong Taeui with raised eyebrows, his hair wet and his face looking fresh.

"....then how could those words...."

Jeong Taeui mumbled like a madman. Yes. It was a disaster. If the thought that just came to his mind was true, even with the smallest chance, it would be a real disaster. Because he wouldn't be able to escape anymore.

"What should I do...."

"You don't look well. Are you okay?"

Gable frowned as he listened to Jeong Taeui's incomprehensible words. He bent down and touched Jeong Taeui's forehead, worried after seeing him with his face submerged in the water and flushed red.

But he seemed fine. There was nothing to worry about.

"Yeah. What should I do?"

Jeong Taeui rubbed his face, not wanting the heat to rise anymore, and murmured.

Seringe was large. At least large enough that searching for someone without any leads was like looking for a needle in a haystack. If someone were thrown onto this island and told to find a person there, they would be helpless and unable to do anything.

Fortunately, the places where people gathered were divided into three or four areas. One place was a commercial area, bustling during the day but quite deserted at night. In other words, there were only three densely populated areas.

One of them was where Jeong Taeui was standing. It was near the South Western coast and close to where light aircraft* landed and took off. This was the busiest and most densely populated area. It could be said that more than half of Seringe's total population was concentrated here.

*(*Light aircraft: Light aircraft are used as utility aircraft commercially for passenger and freight transport, sightseeing, photography, and other roles)*

Another area was a small street on the Western coast, mainly inhabited by locals. Their primary income came from farming and fishing. The younger generation often went to work elsewhere, returning home occasionally during holidays. It was also a place outsiders avoided due to poor security, with frequent theft and pickpocketing, though incidents involving life were rare.

And the last place. It is located along the South Eastern coast, famous for its stunning views of the sea and the colorful coral reefs beneath. Although not widely known, it is considered one of the best diving spots.

However, not many people have the opportunity to enjoy its beauty. There is no other way; after all, this area is mostly private beaches. Even though it's a coastline, not everyone can enter as they please. Just like the magnificent villas lining the shore, these villas have towering walls so high that no one would dare think of crossing them because every corner has guards.

These villas are owned by wealthy Arabs or Europeans. Of course, this does not mean that outsiders are absolutely forbidden to set foot in this area.

Anyone can freely walk along the road. But the only place outsiders can freely walk is just that road. There are no shops or restaurants here. It's just a series of high fences with an empty road in between.

"Not even a single shop or amusement park... Or at least a playground for the rich?"

Gable calmly answered Jeong Taeui's absurd question.

"All those things are available behind the walls in each villa, so there's no need to go outside."

Jeong Taeui remembered being at a loss for words momentarily at Gable's simple answer.

At that time, he was sitting on the hammock, sucking on a mango while studying the map of the South Eastern area he had received from Gable. He had looked at it so much he almost memorized it.

But even so, Jeong Taeui didn't know if memorizing it so diligently was of any use. Because it didn't resemble a real map at all. The images on the map were just red-marked squares representing houses and a branching road marked by a single line in the middle.

The areas were neatly divided. Just houses, houses, and more houses.

"What kind of map is this? Do they sell these things for money?... Ugh, 3000 shillings (about 22,56 USD)?! These swindlers!"

Turning the map over, Jeong Taeui saw the price tag of 3000 shillings stuck in a small corner. He looked at the map again in horror. Considering the prices in this country and the content of the map that didn't resemble a map at all, this was indeed an exorbitant price.

"No other choice. After all, it's something that hardly anyone needs; you should be glad it's still being published. At least this company is probably bankrupt, so it doesn't even appear here."

Splash

Following the sound of water was Gable's voice. He had been swimming around the pool for a long time, and Jeong Taeui suddenly looked up from the map, wondering if he had drowned. Then he saw Gable emerging from the pool with a bright face. He lightly wiped his upper body and walked across the grass with wet bare feet, sitting down on the bench.

A leisurely afternoon.

Once at dawn, once in the morning, and now, this was the third time in one day Jeong Taeui had seen Gable coming out of the pool. He spoke as he folded the piece of paper called a "map."

"It seems you really love swimming."

"Yes..."

After briefly replying, he glanced at Jeong Taeui's leg. He was probably going to suggest he go swimming too, but seeing the cast on his leg, he kept quiet. Jeong Taeui noticed that look and mumbled as he wiggled his leg.

"Maybe it will heal soon. At least before I leave Seringe. Before I go, I must explore the wonderful underwater world here."

When Jeong Taeui laughed, Gable also had a small smile on his stern face - "Okay ." he responded briefly, the smile still lingering in his voice.

He stood up from his seat, his body now dry and refreshed, bowed slightly to Jeong Taeui, and walked into the house. Then, he suddenly stopped at the door and looked back.

"Taeil?"

"Huh?"

Jeong Taeui was distracted by his smile for a long time, then answered in a confused voice when he called. He quickly corrected himself - "Yes?"

Gable was silent for a moment, then sighed softly and spoke briefly.

"Although it seems peaceful, this place is not as safe as you think, so don't go out alone and wander around."

Jeong Taeui looked at Gable. He silently received that look. He smiled and nodded.

"Thanks for the concern."

"You're welcome."

Gable replied straightforwardly but not with his usual cold demeanor, then turned and went into the house.

It was a bit of a pity; Taeui had thought he would smile again.

It was rare to see someone who seemed so cold and indifferent change so quickly with just a smile, and even rarer to see someone with such a joyful and gentle smile. It would be great if he smiled more often.

However, after staying here for a few days, Jeong Taeui had realized when that man usually smiled happily. Most of the time, it was about topics related to water or the sea. He loved water so much that he thought he might have been a fish in a past life.

Thinking back, he had heard that the sea here was beautiful. One day, he asked him about the most beautiful beach here. And Gable had replied that the particularly beautiful area on this island was almost a private beach, so outsiders couldn't enter, but he knew of another wonderful place. And he had promised that when Jeong Taeui's ankle cast was removed, he would show him the way there.

"...."

Jeong Taeui suddenly remembered the moment when the two were talking about it, and it seemed like Ilay's eyes had narrowed into a thin line and looked a bit unusual when he stood next to him. Jeong Taeui quickly shifted his thoughts back to the map. Damn it. Thinking about him was making his face flush again.

Jeong Taeui fanned his face furiously with the map.

After returning to his room in the morning, Ilay had locked himself in. Even if this was supposed to be a five-week vacation, it couldn't be considered a proper break for him. Who would actually give this bastard a sick leave? All day long, he kept receiving a pile of faxes. When the fax machine was silent for a bit, the inbox exploded.

But what surprised him was that this devil actually completed his tasks thoroughly. The messy work was always handled neatly by him. Every day. No, in fact, Jeong Taeui knew that his work was always completed very efficiently without any mistakes. That was something he had become familiar with while working alongside him as a second-lieutenant. If he had a bit more humanity, he would definitely be someone who could greatly benefit the world.

However, thinking about that made his face heat up again, and Jeong Taeui fanned his face like crazy.

"I'm really in trouble, really in trouble..."

Jeong Taeui mumbled to himself and jumped up from his seat. He thought he'd rather take a walk on the street than sit around and let his thoughts wander.

He glanced around the house, occasionally hearing someone moving but not going outside. Seeing that, Jeong Taeui quickly stepped out of the gate. When Jeong Taeui had said he wanted to go outside, Ilay had always frowned and told him not to leave the house alone.

But he couldn't be confined for the rest of his life, and he had no intention of staying indoors. Besides, above all else, Jeong Taeui liked this road.

When he walked through the wooden door, a slightly strange road opened up right before his eyes. On both sides of the alley was a wide dirt road that cars couldn't pass through, long rows of stone walls, with houses of peculiar architecture inside.

As he walked down the labyrinthine road, the gazes of passersby occasionally fixed on him curiously, and Jeong Taeui would smile as if nothing was wrong in response to their curious looks.

He walked a long way, then turned right into a wide alley leading to a large road that resembled a local market.

"Which way should I go now..."

Jeong Taeui hesitated, his feet wavering to the left as he recalled Ilay's cold face, constantly reminding him not to recklessly go out alone. This was the road he had taken in the morning, so he had gone halfway.

In the morning, they had gone to the South Eastern coastal area. That was where the rich people's villas were concentrated. Going halfway down this road, they turned into an alley leading to the main road, got into a waiting car, and drove another 40 minutes.

After enjoying the comfortable atmosphere of the street outside the window, the place they arrived at felt completely different from the roads Jeong Taeui had passed through so far.

It seemed like a real Islamic city. In that street, there were only extremely luxurious houses. Now that he thought about it, the things drawn on the map really resembled that place.

There was nothing but houses along the road. The wall surrounding it was so high that people couldn't see what was inside the house. Outside the fence, all he could see was a towering tower at each corner of the house. And this area didn't have many passersby either.

It was a place so quiet that time seemed to have stopped.

"Looking at it like this... I can't even find a clue" Jeong Taeui murmured, and Ilay beside him glanced at him. Feeling that gaze, Jeong Taeui shrugged and added.

"If I have to go, I'll sneak over the walls from house to house and peek to see if my brother is there."

"Forget it. If you get caught, I'll have a headache. Do you know what kind of people Muslims are?" Ilay said bluntly. Jeong Taeui rummaged through his memory for a moment. When he was at UNHRDO, there was a man from the Middle East in another team. But he didn't seem different at all, except for some religious specifics, such as praying at specific times according to his creed or observing Ramadan (the fasting or dieting month of Muslims). Other than that, he was a completely normal person like everyone else, he laughed a lot and was friendly. He didn't seem like someone who would immediately cut someone's throat just for violating the taboos of his religion.

Ilay clicked his tongue as if he understood what Jeong Taeui was thinking. He sighed and said - *"They make a very clear distinction between what can be flexible and what cannot"*.

"I guess the flexible part is not attacking others?"

"No."

"Not to mention the regulations in their laws, it's best not to touch anything related to their responsibilities and rights" Gable explained from the passenger seat.

"Responsibilities and rights..."

"In other words, it should be called duties, responsibilities, and rights. Duties are the creeds they must follow, responsibilities are their obligations to family and friends, and rights are their personal values. And climbing over their wall means infringing on their 'responsibilities'."

Creeds, family, friends, and personal identity—Jeong Taeui thought that even if someone wasn't a Muslim, these were things that shouldn't be touched. But Jeong Taeui didn't dare to say that out loud. Gable looked through the rearview mirror and spoke.

"It also depends on different cases and situations. But anyway, anyone who owns a villa here is both wealthy and powerful, so messing with them won't end well."

Aha, and only then did Jeong Taeui understand. Yes, he knew how troublesome violence could sometimes be. Additionally, how dangerous it was to provoke someone who was both powerful and wealthy. No need to look far; wasn't there someone like that sitting right next to him?

"But if you can jump over that fence, I'd really like to see it" - Ilay said in a calm voice, and Jeong Taeui followed his gaze. Exaggerating a bit, there was a fence so high that even birds couldn't fly over it, like an impregnable iron wall.

"That's why you said I can't do it. I can't do it" - Jeong Taeui mumbled, trembling as he looked at the wall. Seeing his gloomy face, Ilay chuckled.

He came here to look around and, if lucky, to get some news about his brother. But now that he was here, his mood plummeted rapidly.

There were hardly any people on the streets, just a few cars driving around. When the gate of a palace-like annex opened and a car drove out, everything was shrouded in black, making it impossible for Jeong Taeui to see inside.

"What now? You see this in movies. Let's catch a servant when they go out shopping and threaten or bribe them for information."

"And delivery trucks come every morning; you could sneak into one of those and slip inside."

Ilay provided these heartwarming answers to Jeong Taeui's dejection. Jeong Taeui widened his eyes and looked at him.

"Are you planning to find people like that?"

"If it were that easy to find someone like that, Gable wouldn't have struggled so much to track down his whereabouts."

Wishing he could punch that nonchalant neck of his... Jeong Taeui thought, sighing. Right. If everything could be done so easily, there would be no reason why many other forces also looking for Jaeui couldn't find him.

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue. That was why he came here. He was relying on luck. And that was all he could hope for.

However, whether it was luck or just a fluke, the person who would benefit from it wasn't Jeong Taeui but Jeong Jaeui. As long as he didn't want to be found, even if Jeong Taeui managed to get into the room where he was held in that villa, he wouldn't be able to meet him.

Beside Jeong Taeui, who sighed and scratched his head, Ilay—who didn't seem to want to find Jeong Jaeui—remained calm, as if saying - *"Just rest here for five weeks and then go back."*

"You bastard, you get to rest for five weeks, so wanting to go back after that is understandable, but I didn't come here for a vacation. I came here to find my brother...!"

Jeong Taeui, who had been walking, suddenly stopped and spoke angrily.

Two women walking ahead of him flinched, slowed down, grabbed the hems of their Hijabs, and looked at Jeong Taeui with wary eyes, seemingly annoyed by a stranger suddenly stopping in an alley and getting angry by himself.

Seeing them whisper to each other, Jeong Taeui felt embarrassed. He had no way to reassure them that he didn't mean to threaten them, and he didn't seem able to convince them. In all cases, these strangers would be both curious and cautious.

Their eyes met. The women stopped completely. They seemed even more annoyed.

When Jeong Taeui tried to move forward, he instinctively hesitated and stepped back, but it would be ridiculous to turn around and go home now. He couldn't even reassure them by saying - "I'm just passing through ." because he couldn't communicate with them. (Even if he said that, they wouldn't believe him since they already saw him as suspicious.)

What should he do? Should he run past them? But the moment he started running, he thought they would scream. Should he turn back and go home? If Ilay knew about this, he would laugh and say - "That's why I told you not to go out alone ." damn it.

After struggling with himself for a while, Jeong Taeui decided that the basic attitude of a man should be to treat women well, so he would turn back, walk around the neighborhood, and then return home. As he was about to step back...

"If you intend to go to the beach, this road also leads there."

An unfamiliar, hesitant voice in broken English came from a small alley nearby. When he looked in that direction, there was a black boy he hadn't seen before, about three or four years older than the black girl who worked at the house.

"Oh, yes. Thank you."

Jeong Taeui said cheerfully, stepping into the alley to avoid the scrutinizing eyes of the women. The cold gazes behind him were hidden by the stone wall. Soon, he could sense them moving, hesitantly but hastily, quickly passing behind him. When he looked back a moment later, they were far away.

Even just walking around the streets is not easy, Jeong Taeui thought to himself, then turned to look at the boy standing in front of him. "Oh ." he exclaimed, tilting his head to look at the boy.

It seemed he had seen this boy somewhere before. In fact, just as Westerners sometimes can't distinguish between Asian faces, there were times when Jeong Taeui found the faces of people from different races quite similar. So, it was possible that this boy just reminded him of other black boys he had seen elsewhere.

But even so, Jeong Taeui searched for his memory. And then he soon remembered. The day he arrived on this island, this was the boy who had been watching him from outside the fence

of the house where he was staying.

"...Hello. My name is Tae."

"I'm Totu... I saw you. You stay in the house where Bibi works, right?"

The black boy rubbed his nose and stammered. Jeong Taeui nodded, thinking of the shy black girl who had greeted him that morning.

"Right. Are you friends with her?"

"No. But... um. Familiar name. A bit. We're close."

Jeong Taeui listened intently, looking down at the boy who was stammering and using incorrect grammar. The sentences didn't quite make sense together.

"...I see, friends? Well, continue to be good friends."

Jeong Taeui smiled gently and patted the boy on the shoulder. The boy murmured - "Okay, no problem ." then pursed his lips and abruptly turned around.

"Beach? This way. This way. Follow me. I'll show you."

The women he had encountered on the street had almost disappeared, so Jeong Taeui could continue forward. But as he was about to take a few steps ahead, he noticed the boy staring at him, so he smiled and decided to follow him.

"Alright, let's go. This path is a bit different from what I originally thought, but it's still a way to the beach."

The boy looked up at Jeong Taeui's smiling face as if feeling a bit uncomfortable. Jeong Taeui patted his shoulder to reassure him. The boy glanced at the hand and awkwardly walked a few steps ahead.

Jeong Taeui followed the boy. There was no one else in the narrow alley just wide enough for two people to walk side by side. The sound of their footsteps echoed in the quiet space.

"Where did you go this morning? The car was very nice."

The boy asked after walking a few steps ahead. Jeong Taeui mumbled, thinking about the old four-wheel car prepared for him at the guesthouse.

"Oh, to another town. I was wondering if my brother might be there."

"Brother?"

"Yes. I have a brother. He might be on this island, or maybe not. I'm looking for him. Have you seen anyone who looks like me recently?"

The boy thought for a moment and then shook his head. That's right, Jeong Taeui also shook his head. After all, there weren't many Asians here, so if the boy had seen someone like that, he would have remembered immediately. But there must be a reason why the boy pondered for a moment before denying it.

Whenever the boy looked back worriedly, Jeong Taeui would smile gently. The boy would quickly turn his head away.

They didn't speak any further, and Jeong Taeui leisurely followed the boy ahead.

The boy took them through a maze of alleys, saying it was a shortcut, and that the road to the beach required navigating many narrow, labyrinthine alleys like this, but it didn't take too long. Soon, the alley opened up to tall trees lining the road, leaving behind the low, crumbling walls.

"Here, go straight ahead, and there's the beach. It's very beautiful."

The boy stopped in front of a low tree and pointed ahead. As he said, Jeong Taeui could see the beach right in front of him. Beyond the sparse trees was a white sandy beach, with the sea's waves gently crashing behind it.

Jeong Taeui was very surprised. The color of the sea was beautiful. When he arrived on the island by that light aircraft, the water he saw from above was a deep, transparent blue.

On the beach, where the white sands stretched endlessly, three or four young men wearing only shorts were pulling a small boat ashore as if they had just returned. Offshore, a few more small boats floated on the shallow waters, sparsely populated, like tiny dots in the distance.

Jeong Taeui walked forward, letting the white sand cover his feet. The wind blew. The salty smell of the sea soaked through his hair. It brushed past his shirt and touched his skin pleasantly.

As Jeong Taeui walked towards the sea, he suddenly stopped and turned around. This place was beautiful, he wanted to say, but the boy was nowhere to be seen.

".....It would have been nice to say goodbye to the boy before he left."

Jeong Taeui muttered sadly and sighed, putting his hands in his pockets.

"..."

All he found were a few coins, not even worth a few won, jingling softly. The boy didn't deserve to be caught. (Seems like the boy pickpocketed him 😊)

"This is tough."

Jeong Taeui mumbled to himself, looking down at his feet. His shoes were half-buried in the fine white sand. There weren't even any pretty stones for him to pick up.

Not far away, he spotted a shell about the size of his fingertip. Jeong Taeui picked it up from the sand, gently rubbing the cracked part. It was quite sharp but nearly broken. With just a bit of force, he could crush it.

"If you need something small and light to use as a weapon, Taeil, I'll lend you mine."

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A voice came from behind him, echoing over Jeong Taeui's shoulder. A voice he was very familiar with and had heard many times before.

Jeong Taeui brushed the sand off his hands and stood up straight. He turned his head.

"I'm not doing anything that requires a weapon, and I won't do anything to you."

A few steps ahead, a familiar face stood there. The person was thinner and a bit more gentle than the images in Jeong Taeui's memory, and that person was Xinlu.

Jeong Taeui raised an eyebrow slightly.

It had only been a few months, yet the bright and cheerful child seemed to have disappeared. The gaunt face of the person in front of him exuded a clear masculine scent.

"A matter that requires a weapon..."

Muttering that, Xinlu smiled awkwardly, not the bright, radiant smile Jeong Taeui knew, but a low, calm one. An unfamiliar expression on a face he had once been familiar with.

"So. Are you planning to do something?"

Jeong Taeui asked softly. If so, it would be a waste, he muttered. He didn't have anything that could be used as a weapon. The worthless coins in his pocket wouldn't do anything.

"I'm not particularly concerned about the method or type of weapon. If I can do something with a suitable method and accompanying weapon, I will, but if not, achieving the goal is the top priority anyway."

"Everyone should live with that attitude. By the way, how have you been lately?"

Jeong Taeui asked as he sat down, the soft sand forming a small mound next to where he sat. Seeing Jeong Taeui unconsciously raise his hand to touch his chest pocket, Xinlu smiled faintly and took out a cigarette from his pocket.

Jeong Taeui looked up at him as he received it.

"Have you been smoking, Xinlu?"

"At UNHRDO? I don't smoke often. Sometimes I feel like smoking, so I keep it with me, but I rarely use it there. Not to the extent of buying it to smoke regularly, just occasionally. Just like you, right?"

"Hmmm, but my smoking has increased a lot at UNHRDO, I...."

What the hell, is it because of me that this adorable kid has been influenced by such negative things? Jeong Taeui grumbled with a gloomy expression. Xinlu rummaged through his pockets and took out a lighter. He flicked and held it. The wind blew, and the flame went out. He flicked it again and cupped his hand to shield it from the wind.

"..."

The hand holding the lighter extended unguardedly toward Jeong Taeui's mouth. It was a hand that he could grab and break immediately if he wanted to. Both Jeong Taeui and Xinlu knew that. And they both knew Jeong Taeui wouldn't do that.

Smoke rose from the tip of the cigarette.

"Come to think of it, I think this is the first cigarette I've smoked since leaving UNHRDO."

"Really?"

"Hmmm... did I smoke before? I don't remember. But after leaving UNHRDO, I hardly smoked anymore. At least, I don't remember buying cigarettes with my own money."

"I guess not. But I've been smoking since leaving UNHRDO."

Xinlu took out a cigarette for himself, placed it in his mouth, and sat down next to Jeong Taeui. Along with the clicking sound of the lighter, another plume of smoke rose.

"By the way, how's the guy?"

"That man?"

"Your subordinate in Hong Kong. He was taken to the hospital after Ilay caught him."

"Oh. That guy? He's dead."

Hearing Xinlu's calm reply, Jeong Taeui hesitated a bit. He looked at him with a strange gaze, and for a moment, Xinlu's eyes flashed the answer - "He was killed."

But then, after that brief moment, Xinlu looked out to sea with indifferent eyes, and Jeong Taeui quietly flicked the ash from his cigarette. He thought it was better not to ask anything further. All he could say was - "That's unfortunate." - and received a half-hearted response from Xinlu: "Yeah, it's unfortunate."

"You must have put in a lot of effort to get here."

"Not really. Compared to not knowing where you were, coming to a faraway place like Africa was a hundred times more convenient. It's really nice to be able to meet you."

Xinlu said with a smile. His voice had no hint of jest.

A happy smile bloomed on Xinlu's lips as he looked at Jeong Taeui. The cigarette in his mouth looked quite strange. But finally, Jeong Taeui found something familiar in this man,

that smile with squinted eyes. The cigarette was almost down to the filter. Jeong Taeui held the cigarette in his hand, thought for a moment, then stubbed it out in the sand and took it out. He felt a bit guilty for putting out his cigarette on the beautiful white sand.

"Xinlu, I'm sorry."

Jeong Taeui said as he put the unburned cigarette butt into his pocket. His voice almost whispered, mingling with the wind, the waves, and the distant conversations of people, so small that he himself could barely hear it, but Xinlu seemed to understand what he was saying.

He stuck the nearly burned-out cigarette into the sand and smiled gently.

"But in the end, you didn't do anything wrong. You just feel guilty, that's just your nature, and that's understandable. But honestly, you don't need to apologize to me. In fact, it should be me who apologizes."

"Hmm... Maybe."

Jeong Taeui nodded in agreement. Then, Xinlu laughed as if he had heard something funny.

"Well... then let's take it slow now. Hyung."

"Take what slow? Are you planning to take me away?"

"By knocking you out, by drugs, or by force?" Jeong Taeui said while looking at Xinlu's delicate wrist. No, come to think of it, those slender wrists were surprisingly strong.

Xinlu, about to approach Jeong Taeui, hesitated for a moment. And then he stared at him with a confused look.

"I was going to... but don't you like it?"

"Of course not. Who would like to be dragged away?"

"Then what should I do?"

"What should you do? You can't take me away."

"But you won't voluntarily go with me."

"Yeah. I need to find my brother."

"You mean Jeong Jaeil? You don't need to find him. Wherever he is, he will live well and eat well."

Jeong Taeui remained silent.

He looked at Xinlu and frowned. Xinlu shrugged confidently, and suddenly, his gaze became serious as he looked directly at Jeong Taeui.

"I don't care who asked you to find Jeong Jaeil. I don't care what happens to the one called Jeong Jaeil. I just need you."

"Xinlu."

"So come with me, hyung."

Xinlu stood up, the sand falling gently. After stepping back and shaking the sand off himself, Xinlu extended his hand toward him.

"Hyung. I did something wrong that day. But it was because I liked you too much that I lost control. Obviously, you like me too, but something is wrong here, and I got so confused and angry. I wanted to have you somehow. Really. All of them. I did it because there were too many people who liked you."

Jeong Taeui listened to Xinlu's anxious voice and looked at the hand in front of him. It was a soft and lovely hand. There had been times when he couldn't resist wanting to touch that hand.

Jeong Taeui reached out and touched that hand. Xinlu's worried and smiling expression brightened slightly.

"Taeil-hyung."

"Xinlu. How have you been lately? Since leaving UNHRDO. You used to enjoy working there."

Jeong Taeui calmly asked while touching Xinlu's hand. Xinlu's expression, which had brightened, now became gloomy.

"Um... I'm doing very well. My father handed over a small business to me, so I started learning the trade not long ago. I quite enjoy it too."

"Really, that's good. I'll visit if I have the chance."

"...Hyung."

Xinlu's face turned expressionless. He frowned, and the soft hand touching Jeong Taeui's withdrew.

"I'm sorry."

When Jeong Taeui whispered, Xinlu's hand gripped tighter. Finally, that hand let go of Taeui's and clenched into a fist.

"...Hyung, you like me."

Xinlu said coldly. He looked at Jeong Taeui with a blank expression. For a moment, Jeong Taeui felt a pang in his chest.

"Yes, I like you. Because you're so adorable and sweet. But... I'm sorry. The relationship you want and the relationship I want are very different."

"No, the relationship you want is the same as mine."

"Then the 'relationship you think I want' has changed."

Jeong Taeui said softly, his tongue tingling.

Maybe it was him who had changed. He still found the boy in front of him adorable, but he couldn't meet the expectations Xinlu had. Once again, he felt that his feelings had faded and his demeanor had changed. Nonetheless, he felt sad about it.

Xinlu just looked down at Jeong Taeui. He saw a fleeting anger on the mature yet unfamiliar face he had never seen before, mixed with sadness, resentment, and even pity.

"I... You. No. Since leaving UNHRDO, I've only thought about you. I can't live without you. Somehow, you must stay by my side. Why can't you? Why are you like this? Why can't you be with me? Were you with someone else when you went missing? You should be by my side... --I only thought about that, hyung..."

"Even if I don't want to?"

Xinlu was silent for a moment at Jeong Taeui's low question. After an unknown amount of time, he briefly answered.

"Even if you don't want to."

Jeong Taeui stared blankly at Xinlu. He sighed and stood up from his seat. Instead of taking Xinlu's outstretched hand, he stood up by himself and brushed the sand off his pants. Grains of sand fell and slipped into his shoes.

"That's exactly why we can't be together. And that's why I don't want to be with you."

Jeong Taeui spoke in a low voice. A brief flash of malicious anger appeared on Xinlu's face. Xinlu's face darkened.

Jeong Taeui thought it was absurd. He felt he had seen this expression somewhere, along with what he had felt with Xinlu back at UNHRDO.

Without needing much thought, he resembled that man. At that moment, a man appeared from among the low trees, leisurely walking towards them.

One hand in his pocket, the other rubbing his neck as if it was sore, Ilay RieGrow was walking towards Jeong Taeui. His gaze was fixed in this direction, not leaving Jeong Taeui for a second. His slow, leisurely steps took him along the dirt path that meandered through the white sand.

Gable followed a few steps behind, looking directly at Taeui with an expressionless face. Even when he glanced at Xinlu, there was no change in his expression. Only then did Jeong

Taeui recall what he had said: *"It's not safe here, so don't go out alone."*

Perhaps he didn't mean that the security was terrible. Gable had known that someone was after Jeong Taeui. Just as Ilay RieGrow had known.

Noticing Jeong Taeui's gaze shifting over his shoulder, Xinlu only half-turned his head before turning back, uncertain if it was the face he expected.

"You said you couldn't be with me because of that, didn't you? Hyung?"

Xinlu spoke. His expression had changed. Gone was the face that used to smile gently, replaced by the look of a newly matured lion cub. Unstoppable, resilient, and confident.

"That's just an excuse. Because you're with this man."

Jeong Taeui didn't respond. He couldn't respond. Because the truth was, Xinlu was right. It wasn't just Xinlu forcing him to follow his desires.

But he was with Ilay, not Xinlu.

"You look very happy, can I join you? I see a happy face here."

A slow voice cut through from over Xinlu's shoulder. The seemingly enthusiastic voice approached from behind him. Five steps, four steps, three steps, two...---

Jeong Taeui's movement was almost reflexive, perhaps due to old habits. An unconscious protection before the need to shield an innocent, lovable child from a fierce and malicious man.

Pushing Xinlu aside, Jeong Taeui stepped forward, positioning himself between Ilay and Xinlu. For a moment, Jeong Taeui thought he had made a mistake and clicked his tongue. He had done this instinctively without careful consideration, and that was his error.

Ilay, raising his hand, suddenly halted. The smile faded from his face, replaced by a cold expression. His hand stopped mid-air, then he flipped it over, looked down at his palm, and folded each finger in.

"You're not the one I want to shake hands with, Taeil."

"....."

Jeong Taeui stood there, confused. Stepping back now would be ridiculous, but continuing to block him like this was even more absurd.

"Um... But I want to shake hands with you. Nice to meet you."

Jeong Taeui said hesitantly. He reached out to grab Ilay's clenched fingers with both hands, shaking them vigorously.

"..."

"..."

A dark gaze bore down on the bowed head of Jeong Taeui. Behind Ilay, he could hear Gable chuckling softly. When Jeong Taeui looked up, Gable was already looking at him with his usual cold expression.

Jeong Taeui looked down at the pale hand enveloped in his own, pondering for a moment why he had to hold it. But after thinking it over, he didn't want to see Xinlu torn to pieces by the fangs of the monster before him.

"Taeil... I've thought about this before, but it seems you're misunderstanding something about this kid. But never mind, that's not important."

A sigh fell on the top of his head. As soon as that deep voice ended, the hand Jeong Taeui was holding withdrew, then grabbed his wrist and pulled him forcefully.

".....!"

Xinlu, who had been standing behind him, now stood behind Ilay, while Jeong Taeui found himself behind Ilay.

Ilay turned his back on him and took a step forward.

"Alright, it's a beautiful face after all, so shall we greet each other once more?"

Ilay said with a smile. His white teeth showed between slightly parted lips. It was terrifying and sharp, as if they could easily bite someone to death.

Jeong Taeui looked at him and rubbed his neck. He felt that things were becoming a bit complicated and messy.

Vol 5 - Chapter 20: Fox, Tiger and the cliff (2)

In front of Ilay, Xinlu did not show any signs of weakness when facing his tall figure. He stood before him with a calm face. A cold glint flashed in Xinlu's eyes but quickly faded.

"Thanks to you... I found him. I searched everywhere but couldn't find any trace of him. Thanks to you, I was able to meet him."

Xinlu looked at Jeong Taeui and said, Jeong Taeui licked his lips. While traveling around with the new identity his uncle had given him, it seemed there were people he didn't expect to be searching for him. Really, his brother and he played hide and seek, but only he kept getting caught over and over again.

Ilay tilted his head, smiling subtly, and spoke in a low voice.

"Hey, kid. This person is mine. Not yours to mess with."

Xinlu didn't reply, instead, he looked at Jeong Taeui with eyes that seemed to ask, "Is it because of this person that you said you couldn't be with me?" Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue bitterly. Hearing Taeui's sound, Ilay glanced at him.

"What's the matter, you don't think so? Jeong Taeui, do you feel the same? Do you think it's not that?"

Ilay laughed. The moment Jeong Taeui saw his twisted expression, he was startled. Ilay took a step closer to Jeong Taeui, who tensed up as he saw the pale hand approaching, which gently stopped under his chin. He slid his fingers under Taeui's chin, lifting it and brushing his thumb along Taeui's lips.

Jeong Taeui's expression changed in an instant.

His memory flickered faintly.

It was a part of his memories from a few days ago. The memory of his own suffering in front of others.

Seeing Jeong Taeui's face immediately harden, the smile on Ilay's face disappeared for a moment. Jeong Taeui wondered if the hand on his chin had used more force.

But it was just a fleeting moment.

In the next second, Ilay's expression returned to its usual calm and alert demeanor, but with a cold smile, he looked intently.

"This kid, I wondered if I had met him somewhere before, but it seems he was just raised somewhere."

"Haha." Jeong Taeui frowned slightly at Ilay's cold smile. At that moment, he saw Xinlu pointing a gun this way over Ilay's shoulder. A .22 caliber*, it was a small handgun that, once familiar, could be easily held with one hand. Although the gun looked small, it could easily kill a person at this range if aimed correctly.

"Riegrow... die."

Xinlu said quietly.

Jeong Taeui stared at him without blinking. The hand gripping his chin, the previous memories, and the situation with Xinlu aiming the gun at Ilay, everything seemed to turn white in his mind. Jeong Taeui just stared at the gun in Xinlu's hand and those small lips uttering those cold words.

It was a moment when everything felt overwhelmingly foreign. A moment when he could clearly sense that Xinlu would pull the trigger without hesitation.

Jeong Taeui suddenly realized.

It was his fault for feeling that everything was so unfamiliar like this. Because Xinlu hadn't changed at all. It was simply that he had misunderstood Xinlu's true nature.

Ilay was staring intently down at Taeui, then he narrowed his eyes slightly and smiled.

His thumb moved over Jeong Taeui's lips and slowly fell away. He gently licked his thumb. He smiled, his gaze still firmly fixed on him.

"I already told you, you're mistaken... but well, it doesn't change your perception, does it?"

Ilay murmured in a low voice. He casually turned around. The gun was aimed straight at his head. The sound of the gun's hammer being cocked echoed.

"XINLUUUU!"

Jeong Taeui shouted, but received no answer. The gun was raised as if Xinlu could pull the trigger at any moment. Ilay looked at the young man who could calmly deliver a bullet to his head, and then, in a moment, he laughed.

"As expected... it's not what I thought."

Hearing his soft whisper, Xinlu simply looked at Ilay, his eyes narrowed.

"I thought this kid would have some fun playing a game like this, but no. He's just a _____ a blind puppy*."

(Ilay used a Korean idiom "하룻강아지|란 말이|아," which means a puppy that hasn't opened its eyes yet, implying someone inexperienced and unaware of danger, acting rashly.)

Ilay raised his hand. Simultaneously with that small movement, Xinlu's finger tightened on the trigger. At that moment.

****Pew****

The piercing sound of metal striking metal rang out. At first, Jeong Taeui didn't understand what it meant, but he soon realized it was the sound of a bullet being fired from a silenced gun.

And as soon as that sound rang out, the gun flew from Xinlu's hand and landed at the edge of the sea. The barrel was completely bent.

Jeong Taeui looked at the gun, then back at Xinlu. He frowned, clutching his now twisted wrist. The heavy metallic sound came from behind Jeong Taeui. Behind them was where Gable stood. He was holding a gun with a nonchalant expression, aiming it at Xinlu.

"Kill him."

Ilay said in a low voice. But Gable responded reluctantly.

"I don't want to become an enemy of the Ling family by undertaking such a risky task."

"I think you're wrong."

"No, I've already risked my life for this."

Gable sighed as if it was no big deal. About 100 meters away, somewhere in the forest overlooking the beach, he knew well that the scope of a rifle in the hands of a sniper was aimed precisely at his head.

Ling Xinlu. He was the most beloved son of Ling Ho Long. There was no way he could come to a place like this alone without any precautions.

Xinlu slightly moved his wrist and glanced at Gable.

"What the hell. Do you want to die, you son of a bitch?"

His expression wasn't overly aggressive, but his tone was very harsh. As if his anger was exploding from the pain in his wrist. Gable frowned slightly, his expression as if trying to decide whether to kill Xinlu or not.

If he died trying to protect a monster like Ilay, it would be unfortunate, Jeong Taeui suddenly thought about that.

"...Xinlu. Are you badly injured?"

Jeong Taeui sighed as he looked at Ilay's hand tightly gripping his wrist, suddenly feeling guilty about the words he had just asked.

Only then did Xinlu's gaze turn back towards Jeong Taeui. A flash of pain quickly spread across his usually cold and expressionless face.

"Hyung, it hurts a lot. I think my wrist is broken. It hurts so much~."

The last syllable trembled slightly. That voice could instantly evoke sympathy from those who heard it.

Jeong clicked his tongue and stepped forward. Ilay grabbed his shoulder. But he calmly gripped that hand, pried it off, and looked at him. Their eyes met.

"Where are you going?"

"His wrist is injured. I'm going to take a closer look... –Ilay, don't stop me. I'm not going anywhere."

Jeong Taeui emphasized the last words. Twisting, Ilay frowned. Just as he opened his mouth to say something, Jeong Taeui suddenly sighed. He looked up at Ilay and spoke in a low voice, "Alright." Then he pulled Ilay towards Xinlu.

"Alright, then you can come too. Let's go together."

Jeong Taeui didn't give him a chance to say more and pulled Ilay to Xinlu. He positioned Ilay behind Xinlu, while he himself moved in front of Xinlu and took his wrist. "Let's see." Jeong Taeui muttered and carefully moved Xinlu's wrist.

(Order: Ilay - Xinlu - Taeil for those who haven't loaded yet :D)

Xinlu looked at Jeong Taeui with a strange expression. Facing Jeong Taeui with Xinlu sandwiched between them, Ilay's expression turned peculiar.

Not far away, Gable also lowered his gun. From his position, he could no longer aim at Xinlu because his view was blocked by Ilay.

Similarly, the person holding a long gun aimed at Jeong Taeui from a nearby forest also had his view obstructed.

No one spoke, Jeong Taeui alone examined Xinlu's wrist with a serious expression. Carefully checking the wrist and the back of the hand for injuries. Xinlu also stared at him with the same intensity.

"It might just be a slight sprain. If it hurts too much, you can go to the hospital. But it doesn't seem too serious."

"... Taeil-hyung."

"That's why. Xinlu."

Jeong Taeui spoke calmly. After carefully checking Xinlu's wrist and finding it fine, he let go and looked directly into Xinlu's eyes, which were intently watching him.

"I thought if I didn't go with you, you could just kill me."

"..."

"That's why."

Xinlu was at a loss for words; he just looked at Jeong Taeui. He bitterly licked his lips and scratched his head. He pointed his chin towards Ilay and whispered, "But if you want to kill someone, kill that guy, that one, I've put him in the right position." Jeong Taeui said with an awkward face, looking at Xinlu, who still couldn't say a word.

At first, he hadn't realized or suspected anything. But when he recognized there was a sniper hidden in the forest, Jeong Taeui quickly understood.

The sniper wasn't aiming at Ilay. Of course, it wasn't Gable either. The target was Jeong Taeui. Perhaps with a small signal from Xinlu, the thin, long bullet from the rifle would pierce through his head instantly.

He shamefully licked his lips and glanced at Ilay standing behind Xinlu. When their eyes met, Jeong Taeui raised an eyebrow.

"If you want to kill him, why don't you kill him?"

He's the one you should hate, not me, Jeong Taeui whispered to Xinlu, low enough that Ilay couldn't hear.

Xinlu stared at Taeui as if his words were just a breeze and then fell into thought. He looked at Taeui for a long time before bursting into a seemingly joyful laugh.

"I planned to kill Riegrow myself. My father gave me a good gun, but he also told me not to cause trouble with that family unless it directly harms me... Furthermore."

Xinlu murmured in a soft voice, pausing for a moment. Then he looked at Taeui with a meaningful gaze and continued.

"Because his death and you coming with me are two different issues."

So, you'll still kill me? —Jeong Taeui harshly questioned but then closed his mouth. He suddenly remembered what his uncle had said long ago.

"That kid always surprises people."

Surprises. Damn surprises. There were still a few unexpected things about him that Jeong Taeui hadn't thought of yet. Would they appear more in the future? He hoped it wouldn't get worse than this.

Jeong Taeui wanted to pull his hair out, but hearing Xinlu's soft voice, he lost all strength and sighed. Xinlu lowered his head, looking down at his hand, the wrist Jeong Taeui had seriously checked for injuries, and then Xinlu gently grabbed Jeong Taeui's wrist.

"I had planned to use force to take you with me."

As if talking to himself, Xinlu remained silent for a moment after saying those things, lost in thought. Finally, he lifted his head. A faint smile appeared on his face.

He smiled and spoke again.

"If not, I'd rather take your corpse back. But I'll give up."

Jeong Taeui fell into contemplation upon seeing the radiant smile he hadn't seen in a long time. In this situation, should he say thank you or get angry? But before Jeong Taeui could think it through, he heard a cold laugh.

"Even if Jeong Taeil becomes a corpse, you won't get him. If Jeong Taeil becomes a corpse, I will consume everything, leaving not a drop of blood or a strand of hair. I won't give him to you, nor will I bury him."

Ilay's slow, indifferent voice came from behind Xinlu. The expression on Jeong Taeui's face disappeared for a moment. No, instead of disappearing, it froze.

Ah, Jeong Taeui got goosebumps. He said it without it sounding like a joke. Was this man's mental state not normal?

Jeong Taeui rubbed his now cold arm with a tired face. Ilay raised an eyebrow at him. When their eyes met, Ilay immediately smiled.

On the other hand, the smile disappeared from Xinlu's face. He was silent for a while with an expressionless, doll-like face, and frowned. His teeth made a slight grinding noise.

"I don't want to be away from you for even a second, but... Taeil-hyung. Tell me. Do you want to go with me? Then you'll be mine."

It was a rare, serious tone.

As if he was deliberately speaking to Ilay behind him rather than to Jeong Taeui, Xinlu looked directly at Jeong Taeui and spoke in a gentle but serious tone.

Jeong Taeui looked at Xinlu, puzzled. Then at some point, he laughed.

"What do you plan to do with my corpse? Do you want to skin it and make clothes?"

"No. I would place it on my bamboo mat and hug it every time I sleep."

"..."

Why do these people always make such bloody jokes... ..

Jeong Taeui licked his lips and responded, "Oh, really?"

Seeing his twisted face, Xinlu quietly smiled. Jeong Taeui smiled back.

"I won't go with you."

Jeong Taeui said seriously. Xinlu nodded.

"Alright. Then, I'll wait."

"Uh...—Huh?"

"Anytime is fine. I said if I wanted to, I'd take you by any means. I'll stay by your side and slowly wait."

Xinlu sighed softly and spoke. Jeong Taeui looked at him, slightly tilting his head.

Jeong Taeui brushed the sand off his pants; at first glance, he thought it was just a casual remark, but he immediately realized something was off in those words. Looking at Jeong Taeui deep in thought, Ilay's eyes turned cold, and he spoke.

"Still want to hover around here...?"

Xinlu carefully brushed off his pants, pretending not to hear what Ilay said, then straightened up and looked back at Ilay.

"Yes. I'll take Taeil-hyung by any means if he wants. By any means. Even if he tells me to take him, I'm afraid he might still be exposed to you...—but just one word. If he wants me to take him, I will. Yes, even if I die. But in return, he'll be mine."

The latter words were undoubtedly for Jeong Taeui.

Xinlu made it very clear that if Jeong Taeui wanted to escape from this man, he would definitely help him. But after that, Xinlu himself might not escape.

Jeong Taeui did not respond. It was so bitter that he could only swallow dryly.

"Are you just a grown-up kid?"

Ilay laughed softly and lowered his voice, a hint of coldness seeping through.

"You trust your father too much, Xinlu."

Ilay laughed. Even while speaking, he always smiled. However, Jeong Taeui knew that this smile was no longer a normal one. And surely, others knew that too.

"ILAY!"

Jeong Taeui suddenly called out in worry. As he prepared to take a step forward, Ilay glanced at Jeong Taeui.

"I'm not going anywhere... so don't touch him."

Ilay stopped. His eyes looked down at Jeong Taeui, his thoughts unreadable. His hand paused, as if regretting the neck it was about to grab and tear apart. His gaze shifted to Xinlu.

Xinlu stood a few steps away. It was clear that if Ilay wanted to touch him, it wouldn't take even a few dozen seconds. Just a few dozen seconds.

Ilay and Xinlu locked eyes. A faint smile appeared on Xinlu's tense face. Seeing that blood-stained smile, Ilay's eyes narrowed.

A few dozen seconds. This was too long a time for Xinlu to signal the sniper to turn Jeong Taeui into a companion on Hwang Cheon Gil*.

*(*Hwang Cheon Gil: The path to the world where it is said that after a person dies, their soul will live.)*

Ilay looked down at Xinlu, who was lost in thought for a moment. Beside him, Jeong Taeui murmured, "I've had enough of looking at the sea, what are you going to do now?" Then he took a deep breath, looked at Ilay and Gable, and directed his gaze towards Xinlu.

"I have to get back. If you two plan to leave later, go ahead. And Xinlu. See you again. But before that."

Jeong Taeui strode towards Xinlu, who was staring at him with wide eyes, and suddenly smiled.

And the next moment.

****Smack****

A sharp sound rang out, and Xinlu fell onto the sand, clutching his face, eyes wide with shock as he took a punch from Taeui.

"Tae...il...Hyung....?!?"

Instead of showing pain, Xinlu looked at Jeong Taeui with a stunned expression.

"Aigoo. I hit the wrong person."

Jeong Taeui muttered, rubbing his fist with a frown. He looked at Xinlu with a regretful expression.

"Today, you deserved to be hit, but I can't hit someone I haven't seen in a long time... from now on, don't do that again. I don't want to hit you. Because I'm really weak."

"...is it about the feelings or about wanting to take me?"

"Both! If you do that again in front of me, you'll get punched again."

Xinlu held his face and looked at Jeong Taeui, then quietly nodded. Jeong Taeui thought for a moment, wondering if Xinlu understood why he had been hit, but he didn't bother to explain further. Because if he did, the conversation wouldn't end here. (And somehow, he realized that even if he explained, Xinlu wouldn't truly understand.)

Jeong Taeui looked at Xinlu with complex thoughts. Even with a sad face while rolling in the sand, Xinlu still looked beautiful. But behind that face lay a person who amazed him. After

considering for a moment whether to help him up or not, Jeong Taeui turned around and made eye contact with Ilay, who was standing in front of him with an indifferent look.

"Are you planning to stay longer?"

"Uh... I'm considering it."

"If you're still considering it, then come with me."

"Um... let's see..."

"...I want to go with you."

Jeong Taeui hesitated for a moment and then spoke as Ilay seemed to intend to stay longer. His gaze then fell on Jeong Taeui.

"Why? What are you planning to do with that kid when I leave?"

"It's not that, no, it's just that... the kid who brought me here has gone too far. I don't know how to get back."

Jeong Taeui scratched his neck and sighed. Ilay raised an eyebrow. It wasn't that he didn't know Jeong Taeui had a good sense of direction, but after a moment of silence, he nodded politely.

"Alright, then let's go back now."

Ilay said quietly. He glanced at Xinlu, then turned and started walking forward. Leisurely and slowly, just like when he came. Gable, who was watching them a few steps away, followed behind.

Jeong Taeui stood straight and looked up at the sky for a moment, then sighed and began to walk.

"Taeil-hyung"

Jeong Taeui heard Xinlu's voice calling from behind. He slowed down and turned his head. 'What are you calling me for?' Jeong Taeui asked with his eyes, looking at Xinlu still sitting in the sand.

"Hyung... I like you."

Xinlu said earnestly, words he had heard many times before. And it was also something he had told Xinlu before. The strange heavy feeling made his chest feel burdened.

Jeong Taeui just nodded as if he hadn't heard, then casually used the back of his hand to cover his embarrassed face, and slowly turned and walked away.

Vol 5 - Chapter 21: Steal a Kiss

Perhaps he vaguely realized it.

Jeong Taeui had been aware of it even before leaving UNHRDO.

Thinking back, even when Xinlu used that beautiful face to say something harsh, while it made him angry, it neither shocked nor disgusted him. Such things didn't affect his feelings for Xinlu. Neither better nor worse. Xinlu remained the same.

The only thing that surprised Jeong Taeui was that he had thought the cute face from back then was Xinlu's true face. But now, the face before him was no longer the one Jeong Taeui was familiar with. The slightly gaunt face reminded him of Xinlu's once bright and adorable smile, but now it contained unsettling and dangerous undertones. Behind that beautiful face was a masculine and rugged one.

It was a mistake, Jeong Taeui thought.

Besides that, what he couldn't account for was Xinlu's obsession, which was much greater than he had anticipated. He had thought Xinlu would look for or chase after him, but he hadn't expected this kind of reaction.

"....."

The situation was difficult, with no way to move forward or retreat. Truly a dilemma.

One option was to accept becoming the prey of a fox.

Or become the prey caught between a fierce tiger and the abyss ahead.

Tiger, fox, and abyss. How did things come to this? Jeong Taeui couldn't choose either of the two options.

"....—ughhhhh, what the hell, what is this?"

Jeong Taeui stood under the shower, soaking in the cold water, occasionally groaning and ruffling his hair. Watching a clump of hair flow with the water, he thought that if this continued, stress-induced hair loss would come for him sooner or later.

Jeong Taeui took the bar of soap that Ilay had said was "newer and more fragrant" than the one in his room, lathered up, and stared at the wall in front of him. In general, why were the people at UNHRDO all so problematic? All his complicated relationships started there. And he realized that none of those relationships seemed normal.

"I'd rather turn you into a corpse and take you away."

Jeong Taeui knew Xinlu would do something surprising, but now he realized Xinlu wasn't normal at all. The more he thought about it, the more it felt like a joke. No, given the

situation, it clearly wasn't a joke.

"Your personality became like this because of UNHRDO. No one goes there and keeps their sanity intact, if they do, they have to get out to regain it."

Ultimately, because his uncle was an officer, perhaps he saw through it all. Jeong Taeui grumbled and rinsed the soap off. He turned the water to the coldest setting but didn't feel much cold, probably because of the heat emanating from inside him. Although he had finished showering, Jeong Taeui stood there for a long time, letting his body soak under the cold water and sighing.

"If you want to go, just go. Then you'll become a corpse in my hands, and I'll consume everything, not leaving a single drop of blood or a strand of hair."

As he stepped through the door, Jeong Taeui suddenly remembered what Ilay had said.

One person wanted to take him away even if he were dead.

Another would consume him entirely even if he died.

"No matter where I go, I'll end up dead... Isn't that a bit too much?"

Jeong Taeui sighed and muttered. Saying he had no luck wasn't wrong; no matter whose hands he fell into, he would end up a cold corpse.

Returning from the beach, Jeong Taeui entered the house and intentionally walked past Ilay standing at the door without acknowledging him. Immediately, Ilay grabbed his arm. Jeong Taeui stopped, clicked his tongue, and turned to meet Ilay's cold gaze.

"Jeong Taeui. If I wanted you dead, I would have done it already. If I intended to kill you, I would have done so long ago. I let you live, but who is the bastard that wants to touch you? Saying ridiculous things like killing you? You?"

The cold breath and growling of a tiger whispered in his ear. His lips were close to his ear, and his breath tickled Jeong Taeui's earlobe.

And then, Jeong Taeui realized.

This man was angry.

He didn't know since when. Was it when he appeared on the beach or when they were talking then?

Since when?

Jeong Taeui quietly looked at him. When was the last time he saw Ilay's smile and cold eyes?

It didn't take long; he immediately remembered. It was when Xinlu sprained his wrist, and he went over to check on him. When the sniper hiding somewhere near the forest behind them aimed at him.

"I will not die. Not in his hands... or yours."

Jeong Taeui said quietly.

Suddenly, the breath whispering in his ear paused for a moment. His gaze fell on Jeong Taeui's face.

"Really...—"

"Only an hour left to send the response to headquarters."

Gable, standing a distance away, interrupted Ilay, who seemed to be on the verge of saying something to Jeong Taeui, his expression rather strange.

"My job is done, you will have to finish the part you left behind."

Gable spoke curtly, then looked at his wristwatch. Ilay clicked his tongue.

Thinking back, Ilay had mentioned he had a lot of work today. At the end of the month, the workload at the company nearly doubles. That's why Jeong Taeui hadn't seen Ilay all morning, even though he usually went out around that time.

Ilay took a step back. His hand remained on Jeong Taeui's cheek until he slowly took another step back, then it gradually lowered.

The sensation of his fingertips brushing past his lips before falling away was still very vivid.

Returning to reality, Jeong Taeui unconsciously touched his lips with the back of his hand, then startled, looked up.

Why was he thinking about such crazy things again?! Jeong Taeui felt a strange tingling sensation on his skin. And then he suddenly came to his senses. "Oh," he muttered, and by the time he fully regained awareness, his skin had turned pale. The skin that had been under the cold shower for a long time had taken on a bluish hue.

It wasn't until he saw his condition that Jeong Taeui felt the cold and quickly left the bathroom. His legs were so numb that he couldn't move normally. He nearly slipped on the slick tiles due to the plaster on his casted leg.

Jeong Taeui couldn't stand properly, so he leaned against the wall and dragged himself out of the bathroom, his body freezing and his joints protesting with cracking noises.

"You need to stay clear-headed and survive, Jeong Taeui. Don't torment your body. They say if you're clear-headed, you can survive even in a tiger's den."

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue and muttered.

Even after leaving the bathroom, drying himself with a towel, and putting his clothes back on, his body didn't stop shivering. It was as if the cold water had soaked into his bones.

"Ugh, so cold...—Have you really lost your mind? Who in their right mind would soak in cold water until they're like this?"

Jeong Taeui struggled to step out of the bathroom. He hesitated before stepping his wet feet onto the carpet on the floor.

There was something on the bed that he hadn't noticed until he stepped out of the bathroom. Jeong Taeui stared at the person who had somehow entered his room and was now lying on his side with the blanket draped over his back, taking up the whole bed.

Ilay Riegrow.

He was lying there with his eyes closed.

Jeong Taeui rubbed the towel over his wet hair and approached him. He got close to the edge of the bed, but Ilay still didn't open his eyes.

Ilay was so sharp that he could wake up immediately even if he was dozing off, if Jeong Taeui called his name. But Jeong Taeui didn't bother to call Ilay. Anyway, he hadn't come here for anything important. Because if it were necessary, he would have opened his eyes the moment Jeong Taeui came out of the bathroom.

Between the cliff and the tiger's mouth.

He hated both. It seemed like that cliff wasn't a place he could fall from and survive, and that tiger wasn't something he could defeat in a fight or even escape from. No matter which he chose, it would be the end of his life.

But if he had to choose.

"...."

Jeong Taeui sat on the bed, silently ruffling his hair and deep in thought.

Which way was the better choice for him? Or, which way would be better for others?

The first choice, a face flashed in his mind, but he immediately erased it because he really had no reason or basis to choose it.

The second choice. Again, he couldn't find a clear reason or basis. But he could reach a conclusion easily.

One who was once a very kind boy, but after Jeong Taeui met him, the inhumanity hidden within that person now became apparent.

And one who had shown his inhuman nature from the beginning and still remained so, but had become increasingly sophisticated.

Better for the benefit of the world than for the benefit of someone who increasingly lost his humanity when Jeong Taeui was with him.

Jeong Taeui put the towel on his head and quietly turned to look down at the man lying beside him with his eyes closed. In the quiet room, only the sound of his steady breathing remained.

"....Ilay."

Jeong Taeui whispered his name softly.

Ilay remained silent, not even opening his eyes. As if even the smallest movement had stopped, the entire room was enveloped in stillness.

Jeong Taeui turned back, sitting on the bed. He sat on the edge and reached out to touch Ilay's hair. The bedsheet beside his head was indented; he wasn't even using a pillow.

Jeong Taeui's gaze settled on the face directly in his line of sight. His eyes were closed, and Jeong Taeui scrutinized the still face from different angles, as if trying to catch the slightest flaw.

At that moment, a moment Jeong Taeui didn't even realize.

"...Hmm."

Jeong Taeui suddenly murmured.

Something touched his lips. The warm, dry, and slightly rough familiar feeling on his lips felt strange. Ilay's face was very close, and because he was so close, Jeong Taeui couldn't see clearly.

Jeong Taeui jolted up in surprise. Hmm.....? He groaned inwardly and stared blankly down at the face just inches below him.

That face had now opened its eyes. He looked up at Jeong Taeui, his eyes wide open, not blinking even once. Facing this man, Jeong Taeui couldn't help but unconsciously murmur "hmm" for the third time.

Ilay stared at Jeong Taeui's face for a moment, then finally spoke. He opened his mouth to say something but then fell silent. And then after a moment, he spoke again.

"Do you casually kiss someone who's sleeping like that, huh?"

But his usual flat and steady voice was strangely deeper. After speaking, Ilay looked at Jeong Taeui again. His head tilted slightly.

"Is that so....?"

"Huh?"

"I just kissed you, huh?"

Jeong Taeui asked like someone who had lost his mind. Ilay frowned slightly. He didn't respond but just looked at Jeong Taeui.

Jeong Taeui stood up. Then he sat back down on the bed, staring blankly at Ilay.

"Why would I do that?"

"What?"

Another wrinkle appeared between Ilay's eyebrows. Jeong Taeui became even more confused.

His memory seemed to have been interrupted for a very brief moment when he looked down at Ilay's sleeping face. Perhaps it was because he had glanced at Ilay's lips right then. When he came to his senses, he found his lips were on Ilay's lips without realizing it.

"...It seems I've finally gone mad."

Jeong Taeui said seriously. His face hardened in confusion. Ilay raised an eyebrow, observing Taeui's every move, and his gaze seemed to convey - "This guy must really be crazy."

"Hey, Jeong Taeil. You...—"

Ilay clicked his tongue and patted the back of Jeong Taeui's hand, then suddenly raised his eyebrow again.

"Why is your body so cold... what did you do?"

"Huh? Oh. I took a shower. I showered with cold water."

Jeong Taeui was still so bewildered that he forgot about the cold. It wasn't until Ilay mentioned it that he remembered the cold enveloping his entire body. He rubbed his arms. But even then, he felt a sense of loss.

He heard Ilay click his tongue. Ilay sat up, touched his arm, waist, and leg with the back of his hand, then snorted and muttered.

"Your mind is somewhere else, and you ask me if you don't know what you're doing. You've let your mind drift away with the water, haven't you? Snap out of it, Jeong Taeil."

The back of his hand had moved to Jeong Taeui's thigh, then up to gently touch his cheek. Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay with a dazed expression.

Yes. Suddenly his mood dropped, not knowing why he acted like that. Maybe this was the early stage of schizophrenia.

Jeong Taeui couldn't help but feel depressed thinking about what would happen in the future if this condition worsened.

Feeling the back of the hand on his cheek, Jeong Taeui looked at Ilay. Ilay didn't take his eyes off him for even a second. It was a gaze as if he was looking at something strange and rare.

"...Why are you sleeping here?"

Jeong Taeui asked dejectedly. Ilay slowly removed his hand from Jeong Taeui's cheek and grabbed Taeui's hand, pulling it to his lips and gently biting the cold, tingling fingertips.

"I just closed my eyes for a moment."

"I heard from Gable that you have a mountain of work."

"Um... I only did what needed to be done and sent the rest back. Someone on sick leave shouldn't overwork."

"Sick leave..."

Jeong Taeui mumbled as he stared at Ilay's broad shoulders, his tongue brushing from his fingertips to his wrist, the muscles under his thin shirt clearly visible.

"I've been curious for a long time, but who signed off on your sick leave?"

"An officer's leave requires approval from both the Deputy Minister and the Governor. And Jeong Changin was quite pleased to get the Governor's endorsement."

That's right, looking at it that way, it seemed like there was no one clean left at UNHRDO.

Taeui was stunned and shook his head, then suddenly Ilay pushed his shoulders down onto the bed and lay on top of him. His breath became heavy as Ilay's large body pressed down on his chest. He had been about to say - "That's disappointing." - but closed his mouth instead. Although it was a bit stifling, his frozen body was immediately warmed by Ilay's presence.

Seeing Jeong Taeui open his mouth as if to complain but then stop, Ilay smiled and placed his lips on Jeong Taeui's hand. Jeong Taeui thought he could faintly hear him mumble - "Sometimes I have to bathe in cold water myself."

Jeong Taeui lay on the bed, relaxing and staring at the ceiling. He remembered his embarrassment from a moment ago.

"..."

His eyes dropped as he felt Ilay's lips brushing his wrist, and he watched those lips kissing his wrist gently.

His lips were beautiful. Not particularly remarkable, not too thin but not too thick either. But Jeong Taeui had never paid much attention to them. Until this moment.

Suddenly, a frightening thought flashed through his mind. It was terrifying, surely one of the early symptoms when schizophrenia gets worse.

No. No no. It shouldn't be like this. He needed to control it quickly before it ruined his life.

Jeong Taeui thought darkly and clicked his tongue, whispering to himself - "I definitely have to control it."

"Ah. I didn't hear clearly. What?"

Ilay's lips paused at Jeong Taeui's elbow and he glanced at him. His sharp eyes briefly scanned Jeong Taeui's expression before lowering again.

"You said you wanted to meet him, it must have been quite a joy. Did you feel eager to see him after such a long time?"

Hearing those seemingly unrelated words and pondering them for a few seconds, Jeong Taeui finally realized what he was talking about. He felt slightly dizzy and pained as if the initial symptoms of schizophrenia were manifesting.

"Ah... yes... right, we met."

Jeong Taeui nodded, recalling the young man named Xinlu. He was still the same, or perhaps he had completely changed. Jeong Taeui thought for a moment, then smiled bitterly and sighed.

"I didn't know he would prepare a sniper to kill me."

"Ahaha, so you pushed me into the sniper's line of sight?"

A laugh that was both comfortable and mocking rang in his voice. Jeong Taeui remained silent and glanced at Ilay.

Yes, he had done that. When Jeong Taeui looked at Xinlu's wrist, he simultaneously pulled Ilay, placing him directly in the sniper's line of sight. Remembering that moment, Jeong Taeui felt a brief calm, but what he worried about now was even more terrifying.

"I had to do that."

Jeong Taeui muttered a clumsy excuse mixed with a sigh, shrugging. He hadn't exactly predicted that Xinlu was aiming for his life. Perhaps it was just an instinctive action to avoid potential danger.

"Why? Did you think I wouldn't die even if I got shot?"

Ilay asked, kissing Jeong Taeui's body. After thinking for a while, Jeong Taeui responded.

"That, at that time, I acted unconsciously. But thinking about it now, you..."

Stopping mid-sentence, Jeong Taeui suddenly closed his mouth. Bringing up this topic reminded him of an event from quite a while ago, which wasn't exactly a pleasant memory. He wasn't sure if it was an insignificant memory in this situation.

"You slept with Xinlu, so I thought he wouldn't kill you."

At that moment, the lips kissing the inside of his arm, moving towards his armpit, suddenly stopped. The smile vanished from Ilay's face. Jeong Taeui mumbled, as if lost in gloomy thoughts.

Thinking about it. Yes. To put it mildly, Ilay might have a deeper relationship with Xinlu than Jeong Taeui. After all, they had slept together. Besides, wasn't it natural for them to be at odds? If you interpreted it a bit, it was like Jeong Taeui was accidentally getting in the middle of a fight between these two men.

Jeong Taeui seriously considered whether it was okay for the two of them to continue being entangled because of him and fall into a romantic feud. Then he couldn't help but exclaim.

"OUCHHH!!!"

Under his armpit, the soft flesh inside his arm was bitten mercilessly.

Tears welled up in his eyes. Reflexively, Jeong Taeui hugged his arm, rubbing his thumb over the bite mark to check, feeling Ilay's teeth marks clearly, and even a bit of blood.

"Only that one time."

His deep, husky voice resonated, sliding from Jeong Taeui's shoulder to his nape. Jeong Taeui, still rubbing his arm, realized that the large body warming his cold frame was pressing down on him even more.

And beneath that, the bulge in his pants had become uncomfortably prominent.

"Just one time."

"I know, I know. I saw it too."

"I haven't touched him since the time you saw... —No, I haven't touched anyone else."

His harsh voice filled Jeong Taeui's ear. His thick, warm tongue licked up from his chin to his cheek. As if in anger, his fingers dug into Jeong Taeui's waist and thigh.

Vol 5 - Chapter 22: I like you (18+)

The moment those strong fingers grabbed his thigh and lifted it – although it was useless – Jeong Taeui suddenly thought that if he pushed Ilay away now, he might face consequences that would make him cry. But while he hesitated, reluctant to lose the warmth of the hand holding his frozen leg, his worry became unnecessary.

Because below Ilay's waist, the heavy, solid mass was approaching him. As soon as he felt the large member about to penetrate him, the hand gripping Jeong Taeui's arm tightened even more.

"...—Ilay."

"You've rested enough."

Ilay interrupted just as Jeong Taeui called his name, as if not hearing him.

Ilay was right, he had rested enough. Now Jeong Taeui no longer felt tired from the long journey to get here, and his body wasn't in any particular discomfort anymore. And he wasn't even hungry.

Thinking back, it had been a long time since Ilay had touched him like this. Jeong Taeui recalled his memories and remembered the first day he arrived on the island. Perhaps it had been since then. Yes, since he had apologized, he hadn't touched him.

Suddenly, a truth he had completely forgotten surfaced in his mind.

Although it was unimaginable if that truth really occurred, it seemed there was still a bit of humanity in even this inhumane man named Ilay RieGrow.

"...."

Suddenly, Taeui's face turned red again, and the truth made him feel a bit embarrassed.

Some might think he was embarrassed to say someone liked him with his face flushed like this. But something was really happening in his heart.

But...

At that moment, Ilay was placing kisses on Jeong Taeui's cheek, leaning down slightly. He looked straight into his eyes.

Even though he wasn't thinking anything bad, Jeong Taeui felt guilty and clammed up because Ilay was sharp enough to read everything in his mind. No, even on second thought, those thoughts were really unrealistic, even far-fetched, so he didn't know what to say.

"You were thinking about something very interesting. I could hear your eyes rolling."

Ilay whispered, looking down at Jeong Taeui. A hint of a smile flickered in his deep voice.

Yes, it was surely a very interesting idea. One part interesting, nine parts terrifying, and unable to verify if it was true, just thinking about it was unbearable.

"Taeil, stop thinking."

His sharp teeth pierced his skin. Jeong Taeui shook his head and tried to turn away, but Ilay lifted his hand to turn his face back. His lips lowered and pressed against Jeong Taeui's.

Suddenly, a strange sensation arose in Jeong Taeui's mind. A feeling that had crept into his heart for a moment earlier.

He had kissed these lips.

He had kissed Ilay while watching him sleep. Although the fleeting memory of that moment had disappeared like a passing breeze in his mind, when their lips met again, the familiar sensation returned.

Alright. Maybe at that moment, looking down at Ilay's sleeping face, he had thought he wanted to touch those lips. It was like an instinctual desire.

Alright, alright, alright. He just wanted to understand why he did it.

Jeong Taeui silently looked at Ilay, feeling the familiar tongue intertwining with his. His face was so close that he couldn't discern the emotions on Ilay's face. But he could feel Ilay watching him.

Perhaps sensing Jeong Taeui's distracted gaze, Ilay leaned down, sucking on his lips until it hurt.

"It seems like you've lost your mind today...— Is it because you've seen him after a long time?"

With those words, he bit Jeong Taeui's lower lip. Ilay was silent for a moment, then touched Jeong Taeui's trembling shoulder and whispered.

"Alright, actually even when you were in the organization, your mind couldn't stay away from him... Like a child, all your emotions are written on your face."

"...."

"Have you slept with him?"

His voice dropped to a low whisper. Jeong Taeui frowned at that hushed tone. He licked his sore lip and responded gloomily.

"Why do you care whether I've slept with him or not?"

"That kid has said many times that he likes you."

Ilay whispered as if he were only talking to himself. Jeong Taeui frowned and glared at him. What was he thinking, asking him things he already knew? Like this....., like this, it was really.....

Once again, his heart pounded heavily in his chest. Thump, thump, thump.

A clicking sound echoed, immediately followed by a short scream as a sharp pain invaded his lips and teeth.

"Ah! Hey, that hurts...!"

"Taeil, wrap your arms around me."

"What?"

Their lips were intertwined, and his tongue was so tangled up he couldn't pronounce anything correctly. It wasn't until Ilay's hand squeezed his buttocks tightly that Jeong Taeui understood what he meant.

He hurriedly wrapped his arms around Ilay's neck. Ilay wouldn't hesitate to bite his lip if Taeui delayed for even a second.

Like that day. He had felt a strange sensation. Even though Ilay had requested him to wrap his arms around his neck and hold him, it felt more like he had taken the initiative to hug and kiss Ilay.

"Alright, that's it... tighter."

Whenever Jeong Taeui's arms accidentally loosened even slightly, Ilay would growl, demanding he hold tighter, then bite his lip or cheek. He felt as if he were facing a hungry tiger in a deep forest. Jeong Taeui thought but said nothing. If he did, surely this hungry tiger would devour him whole.

"With him..."

Suddenly, he heard a whisper near his ear. The voice was so soft he could only vaguely hear it. "Jeong Taeui, what about you?" he asked. Before he could respond, Ilay bit his cheek painfully.

"How did you say it? Did you use a gentlemanly face to say you liked him? Or did you say it with an embarrassed, shy look? Or did you say it while swaying your hips like a whore?"

His voice grew hoarse. Ilay fell silent after speaking as if angry at his own words, clicking his tongue. His hands kept removing Jeong Taeui's clothes as if he wanted to tear them apart. The sound of clothes dropping to the floor was faint. Simultaneously, Jeong Taeui felt a hot mass pressing against his buttocks.

"Wait, why are you bringing this up and then getting angry at yourself...?"

"Taeil. Tell me. How did you say it, huh? Tell me."

Ilay lightly slapped Jeong Taeui's buttocks. Even though it was light (by Ilay's standards), the sharp pain and tingling sensation spread with the sound slap. Jeong Taeui yelled and whimpered - "Ow." biting Ilay's shoulder hard with tears in his eyes, but Ilay didn't care.

"This bastard is crazy, getting angry out of nowhere and hitting people?"

"Don't loosen your arms!"

Jeong Taeui yelled in anger, but Ilay yelled back at him.

Hearing that harsh tone, Jeong Taeui quickly wrapped his arms around Ilay's neck again, thinking he was being a bit cowardly, but he quickly dismissed the thought. He hugged Ilay tightly, clicking his tongue and muttering right into his ear.

"What do you mean, how did I say it? Who thinks about things like that? I just said it normally. I like you*."

(좋아해: *I like you, which can be interpreted as either "I like you" or "You like me" in Korean, so Ilay might have interpreted it as "I like you" :DD)*

Jeong Taeui remembered he had said he liked him before. Now, recalling it felt nostalgic like an old faded photograph. *I like you.*

But those final words couldn't leave his mouth; instead, Ilay swallowed them.

Jeong Taeui could hardly breathe under the fierce kiss that seemed to tear his mouth apart, and the next moment, he faced an even more brutal intrusion.

"Ah"

However, before he could realize what was about to invade him, it had already entered.

Jeong Taeui thought he saw a pale hand gripping his thigh, pushing it forward, and touching Ilay's shoulder. At that moment, a light sound seemed to pierce between his legs. It might not have made any sound at all, but it seemed he actually heard it.

"....—!!"

The scream trying to escape his gaping mouth was swallowed by Ilay once more.

His body felt like it was tearing apart. The head of the massive flesh suddenly thrust in without any warning, causing him to clench continuously inside, near the entrance. It slowly pushed deeper into him, then began a gentle in-and-out motion. Even though the small hole was wet, it was still too tight and struggled to accommodate the movement.

"Hey, ah, ha, uh...—huh....!"

Jeong Taeui arched his back, struggling with his own body, continuously shaking his head, and tears welled up in his eyes. He wanted to crawl off the bed to escape the brutal weapon,

but he couldn't move at all because his body was firmly nailed down by Ilay's member, which was deeply embedded in him and wasn't coming out.

"Taeil, Taeil..... Relax a bit, don't cry, don't cry.... there, it's alright, it won't tear... yes, you're doing well."

"...Hold me, will you?"

Ilay's brief words echoed in his ear as he gazed down at Jeong Taeui's tear-filled eyes, grabbed his wrist, and guided him into a gentle deep kiss. His fingers wandered down to where their bodies were joined.

Jeong Taeui, who was half-conscious, suddenly came to his senses when he felt Ilay's hand touch his own member. Damn, even though he held it several times a day when he went to the bathroom, the feeling of Ilay holding it was entirely different. It wasn't fitting to think about this in the current situation, but the thought of comparing their members side by side suddenly popped into his mind.

Along with the pain as if his body was being torn apart and the pride of a man shattering once again, Jeong Taeui began to cry.

"You're not human, you bastard, why are you shoving that thing into me like this? I'm dying from the pain, I'm dying from the pain."

"I won't hurt you anymore, I won't hurt you, so tell me once more."

"Tell you what, you bastard! Tell you what!"

Jeong Taeui shouted, but every time he uttered a word, his face turned pale because Ilay moved his lower body. Jeong Taeui felt like fainting, mumbling.

"Do something, either push it all the way in or pull it out, it's stuck and can't move, it's killing me. Hurry up and do something, either push it in or pull it out."

Jeong Taeui hugged his neck and cried. But like a nail hammered into a tight screw, Ilay's member, with just the head inside his body, couldn't move. Jeong Taeui suddenly cried, thinking about the sins he had committed in his past life.

At that moment, he just wanted to kill the bastard who had told him - "Don't loosen your arms!" But he didn't have the strength to do that, so he decided to strangle Ilay by hugging him tightly.

Ilay moved his lower body deeper into him while reaching for the drawer on the bedside table, rummaging around for a moment. Then Jeong Taeui heard a small click as if Ilay had picked something up.

Shortly after, something slick dripped down his buttocks, precisely where Ilay's member was stuck. The cold, slippery liquid ran along Ilay's shaft and dripped onto Jeong Taeui's waist. It was lubricant.

Ilay moved with difficulty, the tight hole still gripping his member. The lubricant seeped in bit by bit until a squelching sound was heard, and the thing began to move.

Ah. This was the moment.

Although it wasn't being pulled out, at least the previously stuck giant shaft was now showing signs of movement. Jeong Taeui stared at Ilay in a daze.

"Tell me again, Taeil."

The whisper in his ear sounded so gentle. Maybe his mind was too hazy from crying and screaming, which made the voice seem so sweet?

"You like me, tell me again."

Still that gentle voice.

Suddenly, Jeong Taeui thought - "Ah." with a dazed mind.

This man was truly mentally disturbed. His thoughts were a tangled mess, his mind in disarray.

So, there was no way to escape anymore.

Jeong Taeui wrapped his arms tightly around Ilay's neck and whispered hoarsely.

"I like you."

"What?"

"I like you."

Jeong Taeui murmured vaguely and closed his eyes. Ilay was silent for a moment, then began to slowly move his hips, gradually increasing his pace.

"Agh, a, ah."

Every thrust made Jeong Taeui nearly scream. Even though it was easier now for Ilay to move in and out, it only took a few seconds for Jeong Taeui to regret his words.

It felt like a massive piece of flesh was invading his body, relentlessly pushing in and filling his entire belly. Fear overwhelmed Jeong Taeui, making him feel like he was about to be torn apart.

Tears began to fall again. Ilay's pale hand carefully wiped away the tears from the corners of his eyes. Feeling the warm touch from those dry, warm hands, Jeong Taeui struggled to open his eyes. Ilay's face appeared in his blurred vision, clouded by tears.

..... He hadn't opened his eyes or looked at Ilay earlier. Only now did he see this face.

Perhaps even Ilay himself wasn't aware, but the emotions on his face as he looked down at Jeong Taeui, drenched in sweat and consumed by desire, seemed to reveal a hint of humanity, something Jeong Taeui had been trying not to think about for so long.

Jeong Taeui closed his eyes again and held Ilay's neck tightly. The shaft flesh thrusting into him was still painful, and he felt like he could faint at any moment, yet strangely, his mind remained unusually clear.

What are we doing?

The answer was difficult. From Ilay's gaze to his expressions, from his hands to his breath... these things seemed to convey something clearly, yet it was too ambiguous.

He was in trouble.

For some reason, he felt like his heart was melting. The moment he realized this, Jeong Taeui was stunned, and then he remembered Ilay's kiss from earlier.

He was going crazy.

Schizophrenia was wreaking havoc, stirring both his mind and heart. Look, he was holding onto a bastard like this without feeling any hatred. It was madness.

Jeong Taeui opened his eyes once more, looking at the ceiling over Ilay's shoulder.

If this man liked him... could it be like this? Was it because he said he liked him that Ilay was acting this way?

He struggled to breathe because he was filled below and felt like something was about to spill out. He wasn't sure if he would die or if he would die at this very moment.

Jeong Taeui closed his eyes.

He had thought that besides his appearance, Ilay had nothing human about him. But now he realized that maybe Ilay was just like any other person. The hand gently caressing his cheek, the tongue lightly licking the tears from his eyelashes, the warm breath brushing against the tip of his nose—all of these things said otherwise.

"Taeil."

There it was again, that gentle voice calling his name.

"Taeil."

Once more, he whispered.

Jeong Taeui opened his eyes and met the gaze that was staring intently at him from up close.

He suddenly felt curious. Did this man know what kind of expression he had on his face? Jeong Taeui couldn't look away from that strange yet inexplicably tender gaze that softened

his heart.

This man was human too. Ilay also had the emotions that humans have.

For some reason, his chest tightened. Suddenly, he wanted to kiss Ilay's lips once more. So he wrapped his arms tightly around him.

At that moment.

"I'm going to go in now."

The short words came from Ilay's mouth.

Jeong Taeui looked at him in confusion and said - "Umm..." - thinking vaguely, and then suddenly snapping to attention as if doused with cold water.

"What...?"

"Down there, I'm going to thrust in now. Relax, or you'll get hurt."

"What are you talking about? Isn't it already all the way in?"

".....There's still half left....be strong."

Ilay was silent for a moment before saying this, just as Jeong Taeui cried out in shock when he was flipped over. Ilay quietly patted his buttocks. Maybe it was his extremely gentle voice that drove Jeong Taeui crazy, but his moving hips were anything but gentle.

And Jeong Taeui screamed, retracting the thoughts he had just entertained.

The idea that Ilay still had human-like feelings was utterly absurd and meaningless!

<What had made Taeui faint over and over again was only half of Ilay's monstrous rod : "D">

Vol 5 - Chapter 23: Don't wait anymore

In the morning, his head felt heavy.

It could be because Jeong Taeui hadn't slept well, or maybe it was the heavy feeling in his head that tormented him even while he slept. Ever since waking up late in the morning, his mind had been uneasy and unable to concentrate.

He must have dreamed about something, but Jeong Taeui couldn't remember clearly. He felt a vague sense of regret about the dream. Maybe it was a dream about his childhood.

Whenever he dreamt about his childhood, he usually felt like this. Sometimes, there would be dreams that made him feel happy and relaxed all day, but mostly, he felt a longing for the moments in those dreams. It seemed he liked his childhood more than he realized.

Those irretrievable childhood days, he longed for that period and often dreamed about it many times.

His head didn't really hurt but felt heavy as if a stone was pressing on it. Jeong Taeui went out into the garden to walk around and clear his mind, hoping that this feeling would soon pass, but it wasn't until well past noon and into the early afternoon that he began to feel more alert.

Jeong Taeui thought about taking some medicine to see if it would help, so he went down from the second floor to the kitchen to look for some. Just then, he missed a step on the stairs.

"...——!"

He couldn't feel the ground beneath his feet, and in an instant, his chest went cold. Reflexively, he grabbed the railing beside him to hold on, but it was too late.

****Thud****

A loud noise echoed as Jeong Taeui's butt hit the stairs. Fortunately, he didn't fall backward, but his butt still hurt from bearing the full weight of his body.

"Ah, oww...."

Jeong Taeui grimaced and groaned. The landlady seemed to have heard the noise, so she came out and saw him sitting on the stairs with one arm draped over the railing. She approached with a worried expression, probably guessing what had happened.

"Oh, are you okay? Can you get up?"

"Ah, I'm fine. I just hit my butt, so it hurts a little, but not too much..."

"Is your leg okay?"

The woman pointed to Jeong Taeui's ankle and asked worriedly. He calmly waved his hand and said - "Oh, this."

"It doesn't hurt at all. I once slipped and fell on the stairs and got injured, but I doubt I'd break it again on the stairs... it really doesn't hurt at all."

Jeong Taeui stomped his heel on the floor and felt a dull sensation through his ankle. But in any case, it didn't hurt. Indeed, what seemed like pain wasn't pain.

"Oh, I think it's almost healed."

"Oh, I hope so..."

Jeong Taeui looked at the landlady and said, then he fell into deep thought about the past period.

After having his leg in a cast, many things had happened that forced his leg to be overexerted, worsening its condition. But since leaving Hong Kong, his leg had had enough rest, and somehow, the healing process sped up as time went by.

"Oh, I guess it's about time it got better..."

Jeong Taeui repeated once more, then grabbed the railing and stood up, taking a few steps down the stairs. He looked seriously at his ankle and then asked the landlady.

"By the way, is there a hospital around here?"

Jeong Taeui couldn't undergo surgery.

He had a severe rejection reaction, even going into shock depending on the type of medication, even with the best drugs. So, it could be said that hospitals weren't really places that could save him.

This leg was the same. There were a few fractures in the bone, so all Jeong Taeui could do was stabilize it and put it in a cast, waiting for it to heal over time. It was troublesome because if he needed surgery, like inserting a metal rod to stabilize the bone, there was a high chance he wouldn't wake up. When he was in the army, he had been seriously injured and needed surgery. At that time, to exaggerate a bit, he almost died because of the surgery, not the injury.

He shouldn't let himself get injured to the point of needing surgery. But with his bad luck, Jeong Taeui often found himself in situations that a normal person would rarely encounter. So saying he dug his own grave wouldn't be entirely wrong, but...

"The injury has healed. But don't overexert your leg for a while. You'll also need daily physical therapy." - The doctor said

He wore a white coat that had turned yellow, and Jeong Taeui wondered if it had originally been white. Jeong Taeui nodded and moved his now-functioning ankle. The doctor had said that the ankle might look smaller for a short time after removing the cast, and that was true. Not only that, but the hair on the leg where the cast had been was also thicker.

The doctor also mentioned that after removing the cast, his leg should function normally. Still, Jeong Taeui curiously examined his leg and continued listening to the doctor's instructions. Having been injured a few times, he had gained useful experience, and it seemed like doctors always said the same things in such cases. Jeong Taeui smiled, looked up, and simply thanked the doctor.

It was healed, and he could walk normally. But perhaps out of habit, he gingerly stepped on the floor, taking a few tentative steps before continuing more naturally.

The hospital that the homestay owner recommended was quite large and clean for a local hospital, and the facilities inside were good. Additionally, it was very easy to find, but the only downside was that it was quite far from where he was staying.

Today was market day, and Ilay had gone out. Because the homestay didn't have the necessary tools for him to handle his workload, he had left at dawn to go to Dar es Salaam in search of the necessary facilities for his work. Ilay said he would be back by evening, so Jeong Taeui had to wait all day for his return.

He hadn't seen Gable since yesterday either; it seemed like Gable had found some leads on Jeong Jaeui's whereabouts. He had heard that Gable might have to go back to Oman or Yemen for a while.

"I wonder if he'll find him..."

Jeong Taeui murmured to himself as he opened the hospital door and slowly walked down the stairs.

It had been quite some time since he arrived in Seringe. Enough time for his ankle cast to be removed. Jeong Taeui's remaining time was running out, and he still had no good leads to find his brother.

Even though he didn't stay still in one place. Whenever he had the chance, he would go around the Southeast area to look for some clues. Or if he heard any news, no matter how small, he would follow it and inquire from one person to another. But that was all, there wasn't any significant progress.

"In fact, at times like this, a Panzer Faust seems very useful. Instead of stupidly burning down the entire forest, it would be better to fire an anti-tank gun at some suspicious mansion..."

Jeong Taeui muttered involuntarily, then suddenly sensed something and sighed. He couldn't deny the fact that he might be going crazy to even think of using such violent weapons like that madman.

Jeong Taeui walked out of the old three-story building of the hospital and onto the street, blending into the bustling crowd.

"Are you done, Taeil-hyung?"

As if he had been waiting there all along, Xinlu leaned against the flower wall in front of the building and smiled at him. Jeong Taeui stopped and stared at him, blinking.

"Yeah... how long have you been here?"

"Since you went into the hospital. Oh, you got your cast removed. Does it feel better?"

"Yeah. I'll have to be careful for a while, but walking is fine."

Jeong Taeui said, tapping his foot lightly on the ground.

Ugh. If the man heard that Jeong Taeui met Xinlu after leaving the house on his own, he might get killed. Just imagining it made Jeong Taeui let out a long sigh.

The four-wheel vehicle that had brought him from the homestay to here should have been parked in front of the hospital, but now it was nowhere to be seen. He bet nine out of ten that Xinlu had a hand in it. Jeong Taeui glanced at the empty seat of the nearby parked vehicle and then at Xinlu. He smiled and tilted his head as if to say, 'What now?'

"Are you still in Seringe?"

Jeong Taeui asked as he walked forward. "Yes." Xinlu replied, following behind.

He knew the way back home. After all, the road to here was straightforward and not too complicated, so if he wanted to, Jeong Taeui could go back immediately. But if he had to walk back, it could take up to 10 hours since it had taken 30 minutes by car. Ten hours right after getting his cast removed was too long.

The problem was, walking back was a minor issue, but if he wanted to take a bus or other public transportation, that was a bigger problem. He didn't know how to get there and didn't know how to describe it. Even if he tried to ask, he couldn't communicate with the locals without understanding their language. More importantly, Jeong Taeui had no money. He only had a few coins left in his pocket.

The last option was to take a taxi. He would take a taxi, have it wait in front of the homestay, and go inside to get money... But he had also heard that while security here wasn't overly terrible, it wasn't exactly safe either. So it was better not to risk calling a taxi.

Jeong Taeui looked up at the sky for a moment.

Anyway, he was in trouble.

Xinlu walked beside Jeong Taeui, and then following his gaze, looked up at the sky. He smiled when he met Jeong Taeui's eyes. That somewhat shy and bashful face was the one he used to know.

"It's so different from the face I saw yesterday..."

"Me?"

As Jeong Taeui murmured, Xinlu pointed at himself and laughed loudly.

Completely different. Entirely different from the Xinlu he had known at UNHRDO. Though everything about his face in both the past and present seemed to be carved from the same mold, Xinlu still seemed like a completely different person. Jeong Taeui had thought he was good at reading people, but reality proved him wrong...

"Xinlu. You said you would wait. You wouldn't force me to go with you, and you would wait until I voluntarily went with you."

Jeong Taeui said as he headed towards the homestay. Beside him, Xinlu nodded.

"Yes."

"But if you've shown up in front of me again like this, it won't be that simple anymore."

"I said I would wait, but now I can't help but see you."

Xinlu said nonchalantly. After pausing for a moment, he continued with a slightly altered tone.

"Honestly, sometimes I worry about it. I hear a voice in my heart saying I want to have you somehow. Whatever it takes, by any means, I have to keep you by my side."

"....Kill me, skin me, and lay my skin on a bamboo mat to hug while you sleep?"

Xinlu laughed out loud, probably thinking Jeong Taeui was joking. But Jeong Taeui wasn't joking, just as Xinlu wasn't when he uttered those words without a hint of jest.

His mouth tasted bitter, and his hand instinctively reached for his chest pocket. Noticing the gesture, Xinlu took a cigarette from his pocket and held it out to him. The tip of the cigarette glowed red. "Thanks." - Jeong Taeui replied briefly, exhaling a puff of smoke into the sky.

The truth was, he was confused. Not just at this moment, but there had been times when he felt bewildered by this. About Xinlu, about that man, and about himself.

Since the day Xinlu appeared in Seringe, Ilay would come to his room every night, but they wouldn't always do that. He wouldn't do anything if he felt Jeong Taeui had overexerted himself or was tired from the previous day. Otherwise, Ilay would caress his body all over before he fell asleep.

At times like that, he would look at Ilay vaguely, feeling like he was fainting from exhaustion. Even when he slept, the smallest noise would cause Ilay to immediately open his eyes and stare at him for a long time (Jeong Taeui couldn't tell if he was really sleeping or just had his eyes closed). With an indescribable confused heart. If he said he didn't like that feeling, it wouldn't be true. So it was even more complicated and confusing.

"Xinlu. I think it would be better if you didn't wait any longer."

Jeong Taeui quietly exhaled cigarette smoke. His voice was lost in the noisy crowd. Xinlu didn't reply, just walked beside him as if he hadn't heard, smiling calmly. Suddenly, he glanced at Jeong Taeui and asked.

"Taeil-hyung. The cigarette you're smoking isn't exactly a cigarette."

"Huh?"

Jeong Taeui raised his eyebrows in confusion with half a cigarette still in his mouth. This was the first time he smoked this type of cigarette, and it seemed a bit large, but he didn't know if there was anything special about it...

"I've never tried it before either... but it's opium. Although I mixed it with tobacco leaves and adjusted the ratio a bit to make it easier to smoke."

****Hack****

Jeong Taeui coughed violently as he spat out the cigarette in his mouth – no, it wasn't even a cigarette. Jeong Taeui choked on the smoke, his throat burning. He coughed and pounded his chest while Xinlu, looking concerned, said.

"Are you surprised? I was going to tell you after you finished smoking."

Xinlu whispered with a worried expression, offering him a bottle of water. Jeong Taeui's coughing subsided, but he only looked at the plastic bottle with suspicion and didn't take it. Xinlu laughed.

"It's just water. And what you just smoked was just a cigarette. Are you afraid I actually gave you opium?"

"..."

What kind of person is this... Jeong Taeui thought as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"But there is opium, it has been mixed and processed and sold as cigarettes. It's always been one of our company's top five best-selling items. Of course, it's not sold on the market."

Jeong Taeui took the bottle of water from Xinlu. "It's really just water." he thought, looking at Xinlu warily as he drank it. Xinlu looked up at the sky with a cheerful expression and continued the conversation as if recounting a movie.

"Well, they say that just smoking it for a few days makes it impossible to resist its temptation anymore. Then, anyone can easily manipulate that person."

Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue bitterly. So, Xinlu didn't intend to kill him anymore; instead, he planned to turn him into an opium addict and then take him away.

"Therefore... I did consider that method. And no one would want you if you became a cripple like that. Then I could have you entirely."

"...Xinlu."

Jeong Taeui said shortly. Only then did Xinlu stop looking at the sky and look straight at Jeong Taeui. From that gaze, Jeong Taeui realized that the words, which sounded like a joke, seemed to contain a hint of sincerity.

Jeong Taeui didn't know how to respond. He closed his mouth, looked at Xinlu, occasionally sighed, and murmured helplessly.

"I wish I only had to deal with one unmanageable lunatic."

Xinlu burst into laughter. His demeanor was still as endearing as a small, round, and adorable marble rolling back and forth like before.

"No, it's not like that. When I was on the plane coming here, I did think about everything, but when I saw you... I couldn't do it anymore."

Xinlu excitedly waved his hand, shining like the sun, taking two steps ahead and then turning back to face him, tilting his head and murmuring - "It's so beautiful."

As Xinlu said, the sky was beautiful. The sunset was gradually descending, the distant sky still a deep blue, but where the sun was setting, a pale purple hue blended with the blue.

Jeong Taeui quietly watched a radiant Xinlu.

He looked so cute, even knowing that deep inside that person could be a monster beyond his imagination, to Jeong Taeui, Xinlu was still an adorable child. The initial gentle feelings couldn't easily fade away. Reflecting on it, there were moments when he wanted to be with this child. They even went to a hotel together – although he knew their desires were different – or perhaps too similar – so in the end, they couldn't be together.

"...."

Anyway, if talking about love, Xinlu seemed to be a better choice than that inhumane person. At least Xinlu's body was like a human.

For a moment, a thought flashed in his mind. Then Jeong Taeui sighed in frustration.

But after all.

"Xinlu... don't wait anymore."

Jeong Taeui repeated what he had just said. Xinlu was still looking up at the sky and murmured softly.

"Even if I wait, it's no use?"

"...yeah."

"If that's the case, I can't..."

Xinlu quietly said, shifting his gaze from the sky that was gradually sinking into darkness, then looked at Jeong Taeui and smiled.

"I haven't even waited, but if you say so, I guess I don't need to hide my ways of taking you away anymore."

"That's... not allowed."

"Not allowed, right? So, don't say things like that. Just be cheerful and gentle with me. Oh, right. Taeil-hyung, let's go to the market, the market."

What was Xinlu thinking? He said while grabbing Jeong Taeui's sleeve. Jeong Taeui raised an eyebrow.

"Market?"

"There's a place nearby called Baheb, and they have a night market there once a week. They say it's quite interesting. It's only about a 10-minute drive from here, very close, very convenient, and it's just the right time."

Jeong Taeui nodded and responded with an 'ah'. It was a place he had visited a few times. Many people did business there, so he often went there once a week when the market was open to catch some news.

And, of course, he hadn't gained anything. Gable once bought a handle for an umbrella, and he had no idea what he was going to do with that piece of wood without an umbrella.

"Let's go, hyung." - Xinlu said, tugging at his sleeve.

Jeong Taeui glanced at his watch. It was almost time for Ilay to return. No matter what, if he came back and didn't find him, he would definitely be annoyed that he went out alone again.

"No. I have some things to do today...."

"Please, come with me. I heard there are a lot of people there, so maybe there will be someone... But I'm a little scared to go alone."

Xinlu's eyes widened with a shimmering look, and he spoke softly. The corners of his mouth turned down slightly, giving him a genuinely scared appearance. But Jeong Taeui, looking deeply into those eyes, thought to himself that if he got fooled by that look again, he would be a true idiot.

"Next time. I need to go back today. Sorry."

"Is that so... well, there's no other choice then."

Xinlu said thoughtfully but surprisingly stepped back obediently. He sighed softly and then smiled at Jeong Taeui.

"By the way, Taeil. It's still a long way to your place from here. Are you planning to walk?"

"...."

Jeong Taeui had completely forgotten.

He suddenly remembered that he was standing in the middle of the street without a penny in his pocket and no means of transportation.

It seemed that just after taking off the bandage, his injury was ready to flare up again.

Jeong Taeui calmly looked at Xinlu. Xinlu just smiled brightly, as if unaware of anything.

Vol 5 - Chapter 24: Could it be that he liked him?

Situated on the southern coast of the island, Baheb is quite a peaceful place. From August to October, during the cool monsoon season, it's bustling with surfers, but outside of that period, Baheb remains quiet and serene.

It only comes alive once a week on Friday evenings. This is because of the night market held in Baheb's central square. The crowd is so thick that Jeong Taeui wonders if the entire population of Seringe flocks there.

However, not many people come to the 'market' just to buy essential items. If it's just for regular shopping, many traders operate in various places throughout the week.

The central square of Baheb is very large, with a small fountain in the middle, and traders spread out their stalls around it. There are many common items in the market, but also many rare things that can be found in regular wholesale markets.

And on the other side of the fountain, near the ruins of a now-collapsed castle, there's a flea market. There, anyone can bring items they no longer use at home or bring handmade goods to sell. Since it's not a fixed market, it can be very crowded at times, but also very quiet at others.

Jeong Taeui and Xinlu arrived in Baheb just as the sun was setting.

Maybe because it wasn't time for the market yet, the square still looked very deserted. Occasionally, a few traders arrived early to get good spots, but there were very few people browsing and buying. It would be another hour or two before the night market started. Jeong Taeui heard a white man, who looked like a tourist, say this as he glanced at a travel book he was holding.

Surprisingly, such a small book had information about such a remote place, which was crazy. Jeong Taeui noticed the small book the man was holding. When he was in Berlin, he had heard Kyle talk about it so much that it constantly rang in his ears. Jeong Taeui recalled the memory of Kyle saying he had to give up his business after publishing such a book. But Taeui said nothing more.

"The empty lot over there has something like a stone wall. Hmmm....---- it's like marking a territory."

Xinlu looked around the sparsely populated square as if puzzled, then directed his gaze into the distance.

Next to the square, scattered stone walls have been torn down, revealing flat ground, with grass growing thickly behind it.

"Ah, I've heard it used to be a castle."

"Castle ruins? Has this island been inhabited for so long? Long enough to build an entire castle?"

Xinlu widened his eyes as he looked at Jeong Taeui walking ahead. In just a few hours, this market would be packed.

"According to the people who have lived here for generations, yes. A few hundred years ago, there was a highly developed civilization here."

"Hmmm. Places like this are quite common. But if what they say is true, it seems the valuable ruins here are poorly managed."

Xinlu walked towards the stone walls, curiously peering inside. It seemed like it was originally a circular structure with many layers, but most of it had been demolished, leaving only some remnants.

There's even a bustling flea market here, so it's likely not poorly managed, but rather intended for demolition from the start... Jeong Taeui followed a few steps behind Xinlu. Observing the pile of stones regarded as a castle and watching Xinlu intently examine the surroundings, Jeong Taeui smiled. Seeing Xinlu's figure intermittently appear and disappear behind the stone walls, he wondered if this would resolve his doubts about the boy. Jeong Taeui took out a cigarette and put it in his mouth.

Ilay would be back soon. If he returned today, he would probably end up as a corpse... Err Well, he didn't know.

Jeong Taeui hesitated as he tried to sit on the pile of stones but then stopped. Although it was said to be unmanaged, it was still a precious ruin, so he shouldn't sit on it. Jeong Taeui quietly sat on a large rock nearby instead.

The sky turned a deep blue. In the distance, stars twinkled faintly. After the red-purple streaks of the setting sun disappeared, countless stars would replace the sun to shine.

A starry night like tonight could only be seen in a vast, desolate place in the Southern Hemisphere like this. This was a sight Jeong Taeui would never see in the big cities of distant countries where he had lived or visited. When he came to this island and saw the Milky Way clearly spanning the high sky like a river flowing through the night sky, Jeong Taeui was speechless for a while.

In such a beautiful place, he felt more confident that somewhere on this island, his brother was there too. Here, with both Xinlu and Ilay, there were indescribable emotions welling up inside him.

On a beautiful day, Jeong Taeui's mood also relaxed.

Jeong Taeui exhaled a contented sigh, blowing smoke into the deep blue sky.

"I wonder if I can share these peaceful moments and beautiful sights with someone..."

"If it's you, I can say it with you, hyung."

He inhaled sharply. Jeong Taeui almost choked on the smoke, coughing violently. Xinlu, who had been intently looking at something under a stone wall in the distance, was now standing right next to him.

Does this kid know how to teleport or something? Jeong Taeui smokes his cigarette, staring at Xinlu in astonishment. Xinlu intended to sit on the stone wall next to Jeong Taeui but, after a moment's thought, sat down on the rock where Jeong Taeui was sitting. Jeong Taeui squinted, this was one of the things he liked about Xinlu.

"Ah... That's great. Thank you, it's wonderful to see you again."

Xinlu smiled as he spoke. Jeong Taeui raised an eyebrow, the ash from his cigarette falling. Xinlu continued speaking words that he couldn't immediately understand.

"A few years ago, I visited Africa. Every three years, UNHRDO opens its branches and allows candidates to visit. Candidates can't choose which branch they'll go to, and I ended up at the African branch, staying in Johannesburg for a few days. Since I was already in Africa, I decided to look around a few places before heading back."

Jeong Taeui nodded, silently waiting for the rest of Xinlu's story. Perhaps it was a simple feeling of guilt when Xinlu recounted a story about UNHRDO, the nostalgic look on his face made Jeong Taeui's mouth feel bitter as he exhaled a puff of smoke.

Everyone has moments when they must give up something to gain something else. Jeong Taeui had experienced this a few times. Sometimes what he wanted was trivial, but other times it was significant, and what he had to trade was equally substantial.

Over a long period, he sometimes wondered if it would have been better if he hadn't made such choices back then. But regardless, he didn't regret his past decisions, though thinking back on them was inevitable.

Xinlu had left UNHRDO because of him. That was Xinlu's choice, and there was no place for Jeong Taeui to interfere with it. So logically, he knew it wasn't his fault. But even so, Jeong Taeui couldn't help but feel guilty and heavy-hearted. Perhaps one day, long in the future, or maybe just soon, Xinlu would think about it. That it might have been better if he hadn't made such a choice back then.

"Things can't be changed. That's how people live." Jeong Taeui mumbled to himself as he brushed off the ash. Xinlu began his story with UNHRDO but ended with something unrelated.

"The sky here is so beautiful...—But for those who have never seen it with their own eyes, no matter how you describe it, they will never imagine it. The sky stretching endlessly and those clouds with the bright full moon."

Looking up at the sky, Xinlu murmured as if dreaming.

On the pitch-black sky, twinkling stars appeared one by one. Jeong Taeui seemed to understand the sky Xinlu was talking about. Faced with such beauty, he could only remain

silent.

"I want to have it. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Maybe in the future, no matter what other scenery I see, nothing will compare to it. Even if I see that sky again in the same place in the future, it might not be as beautiful as the sky I saw that day. I don't know. It's just that, at that moment, I really, really wanted to have that sky."

"... I see..."

"I couldn't just treat it like a photo and hang it in my room. No matter how good the camera is, it can't capture the beauty of seeing it with your own eyes."

Xinlu fell silent. Jeong Taeui also remained quiet. Then he sighed and took out a pack of cigarettes, pulling one out. With a click, a quiet sound, a puff of smoke rose.

After taking a couple of drags and exhaling, Xinlu continued speaking, and a faint smile appeared on Jeong Taeui's face.

"Thinking back now, I've never felt so desperate as I did then. I wanted to go crazy, but I couldn't do it... That really..."

Next to Xinlu, Jeong Taeui was lost in thought. He tapped the nearly burnt-out cigarette on the rock and spoke up.

"Yes. You can't bring the sky down and hang it in your room. Nor can you use opium to make it addictive."

Xinlu laughed heartily. He spoke with the cigarette still in his mouth.

"Since I was a child, I have always gotten what I wanted."

Jeong Taeui didn't respond.

Whether it's people or the sky, neither can be owned like possessions. So, he couldn't do that. No, even the sky is divided by national borders, and each country has its own airspace, let alone people. While nations fiercely protect their airspace, on the ground, people are still sold like livestock, whether by their own choice or someone else's.

Right now, Jeong Taeui isn't very confident. If Xinlu really wanted to turn him into an addict by drugging him for a few days, he wasn't sure he could escape, even if it wasn't opium.

But.

Jeong Taeui had once liked Xinlu. Xinlu had once been a very lovable child. So, he hoped Xinlu wouldn't choose such a path. Although Xinlu might find satisfaction in such twisted happiness, Jeong Taeui still wanted him to be happy in another way.

"One day, when time has passed, would you... still want to be with me if I became the way you wanted?" (meaning becoming an addict)

Jeong Taeui suddenly asked. In reality, it wasn't really a question but more of a playful comment. Xinlu didn't respond. Jeong Taeui took out a second cigarette. He didn't know what the answer would be. He truly didn't know and had no way of finding out. The only thing he could know was what he was thinking at this moment.

But in that hidden corner of his heart, a vague but undeniably clear feeling was speaking.

"Tell me again, Taeil."

A familiar voice whispered in his ear, suddenly echoing in his mind.

"...."

His heart skipped a beat, as if he stopped breathing for a moment. Thankfully, the darkness perfectly concealed Jeong Taeui's blushing face. He quietly lowered his head and stared at the tip of his shoes as if a bug had flown past his feet, then brushed off some ash from the cigarette.

His neck was burning. The sound of his voice, the warmth of it, the moist breath on his ear, the warm hand touching his skin, stroking it—each moment was vividly replaying in his mind as if it was happening right now.

How strange. And how embarrassing.

Looking back, although he had never seriously thought about himself, it seemed that he was quite popular in his own way. There were a few people who liked him. He had been confessed to a few times. He even heard such words from people in his neighborhood whom he met daily in the past.

There was nothing for Jeong Taeui to feel uncomfortable about because of that. He didn't have any problems with it. He would thank the person, but that was all. If Jeong Taeui didn't have feelings for the other person, he would stop right there. He wouldn't be bothered or agitated by such things.

But.

..... Was it because he was afraid? Or was it because he felt nervous? He didn't know if it was because Ilay was not someone he could respond to normally like others, so perhaps it was because he was anxious.

Jeong Taeui slowly shook his head and thought about it. If a man named Ilay Riegrow liked him. (No, he didn't even need to add the 'if' anymore. He wasn't someone so cautious or timid.)

Thinking about it made his nape feel hot. He didn't know what to do or how to find an answer. Jeong Taeui just felt really confused.

Could it be that he liked him?

Deep in his thoughts, an unexpected answer popped up in his mind. His nape was burning. The heat quickly spread from his ears to his entire face.

Vol 5 - Chapter 25: Decision

"Taeil-hyung...?"

Jeong Taeui was silently looking down at his feet, flicking away the ash from his cigarette and taking a drag when he heard Xinlu cautiously calling him from beside him. It was difficult. The night was dark but still light enough to see the face of the person opposite. And Jeong Taeui didn't know how to respond to the gaze Xinlu had fixed on him.

"Taeil-hyung."

Xinlu called again. Jeong Taeui quietly responded, 'hmm.'

As expected. It's impossible.

No matter how much time passes. Jeong Taeui couldn't be with Xinlu in the way that Xinlu wanted. And he couldn't ask someone to wait for him in vain like that.

"Xinlu. I'm sorry."

Jeong Taeui quietly sighed. Xinlu didn't say a word, just stared at Jeong Taeui in a daze.

Night had fallen, and the time for the night market was drawing near. People were starting to gather little by little.

In front of the castle ruins where they were sitting, people were spreading out their usual goods in their spots, and even on the other side of the fountain in the central square, merchants had begun displaying their goods beautifully. A few customers were already milling around between the newly set up stalls for tonight's business.

Xinlu had said he wanted to come here to see the market, but even when the time for the market had come and it was bustling with people, Xinlu didn't glance at it even once. He only looked at Jeong Taeui.

"Hyung, you were the one who liked me first."

Finally, Xinlu whispered in a voice low enough to blend with the noisy crowd. That quiet, serene voice was tinged with sadness.

Jeong Taeui didn't respond. Should he apologize? No, that didn't seem right either. So, he just looked at Xinlu silently.

Then Xinlu sighed quietly. He looked down at his feet for a moment before lifting his head again. The pitiful and miserable expression from before was gone without a trace, leaving only a calm face that could smile at any moment.

"It was too sudden, Hyung. I said that if you said something like that, I wouldn't hold back any means to take you with me anymore."

"...."

"I have a lot of time. I have a lot of time. So you don't need to worry about me."

Xinlu smiled and stood up from the rock, pretending to dust off his pants.

"So let's go around and have a look. It seems the market has started. It would be nice if we could find something unusual and interesting. A flea market in a remote part of Africa sounds interesting, doesn't it?"

"...Yes. It would be great if we could find something good here. Who knows, we might come across something unexpectedly cool."

Jeong Taeui smiled. Perhaps because his heart felt so heavy, his laughter lacked energy. Xinlu decided to pretend not to notice. Jeong Taeui also decided to act as if nothing was wrong.

"You'll go ahead and have a look, I'll finish the cigarette and come over."

Jeong Taeui held up the cigarette he had just taken out of the pack. He put it in his mouth and lit it.

"Hyung, smoking like that isn't good for your health... Alright, I'll go check out the fountain first, so come quickly, Taeil-hyung."

Maybe Xinlu wanted to wait until Jeong Taeui finished smoking and then go with him. But after thinking for a moment, he changed his mind, smiled, and turned to walk away.

Jeong Taeui silently thanked Xinlu. Just as Xinlu guessed, he wanted to be alone at this moment. In the night breeze, his mind was both clear and chaotic.

"...."

He exhaled a long stream of smoke into the sky. Xinlu had reached the fountain. People were starting to gather, but he wasn't too worried. After all, he wasn't someone easily harmed, and he was confident he could find Xinlu even if the crowd doubled or tripled. And even if he couldn't find Xinlu, Xinlu would find him first.

"Ilay... Ilay Riegrow. It's terrible."

Jeong Taeui let his thoughts drift with the smoke.

He sighed, looking up at the starry sky, and remembered that familiar name.

"If I really like him, then what..."

Jeong Taeui worried.

And then, terrible memories surfaced in his mind. There were so many memories about the man named Ilay Riegrow that he couldn't count them all on his fingers. They were all scary, unpleasant, or infuriating to recall.

Jeong Taeui simultaneously remembered his face alongside those memories.

"...Ah, right. I'm angry, outraged, and scared. If I stay by his side, I definitely won't live long. Being with someone as terrifying as him, if I don't die by lightning, I'll die by his hand."

Jeong Taeui muttered. Then he suddenly clamped his mouth shut for a moment. Going home today also worried him about Ilay discovering whom he had met. Jeong Taeui sighed, knowing it was useless to lament his situation now.

"I can't do anything about it." Jeong Taeui thought, flicking the ash off his cigarette. As always, he had no choice but to wait for time to solve everything. He had no other option; there was no other way. Jeong Taeui could only hold his breath and wait for everything to pass.

There had been times when he had experienced this feeling. Situations and moments where even his willpower was powerless. There were times when Jeong Taeui felt like he was struggling to the brink of death but ultimately didn't die. When that happened, he couldn't do anything but hold his breath. He could only hold his breath and wait not to be swallowed by what people called 'time.'

Time passed, and afterward, only fading memories remained.

Jeong Taeui lightly tapped the cigarette filter, letting the ash fall gently. At that moment, the image of Ilay's pale hands vividly appeared in his mind. Those beautiful white hands often tapped lightly on the table when he was deep in thought. Jeong Taeui smiled, looking at his own hands that were neither white nor smooth.

"Then just stay by his side for a while."

But Jeong Taeui quietly swallowed those words before his will.

The cigarette was almost down to the filter, just enough for one last puff. After finishing this cigarette, Jeong Taeui thought he would head to the fountain to find Xinlu.

Jeong Taeui held the cigarette in his mouth. The square was bustling with people coming and going. Near the fountain, the sounds of people talking, laughing, and music filled the air. Somewhere in the center of the square, Xinlu was probably there. Although the crowd currently obscured his view, after finishing this cigarette and taking a few steps, he would likely find him.

Jeong Taeui took a long final drag. Until the bright red ember near the filter finally extinguished, he exhaled the smoke slowly.

Jeong Taeui climbed down from the rock and stood up.

He decided to walk around with Xinlu for a while before returning to the homestay. He hoped that Xinlu wouldn't use every means to drag him away today. Even if he returned to the homestay, he would still face Ilay's cold, crescent-moon-like terrifying gaze. But he had no other choice.

He had resolved to stay with him for a while, and it seemed like he would have to witness that gaze many more times in the future.

Jeong Taeui smiled. Then he slowly walked to find Xinlu.

“Where could Xinlu be...”

Maybe he had found something interesting in the market? Xinlu might be happy if he discovered something unexpected and fascinating.

Jeong Taeui walked into the crowd and slowly looked around.

There were many people here. The closer he got to the fountain, the denser the crowd became, making it difficult to move without bumping into someone.

People of all ages were there, from the elderly to children who seemed to be still in school. A man with a thick beard and wide eyes, along with a woman with her hair in a high bun, were curiously looking around. Even within Islamic culture, not everyone was the same, so their attire also had subtle differences.

Some women wore simple headscarves, while others covered their entire bodies with Abayas.

The market was bustling with locals, occasional visitors, and tourists who might only visit once and never return. Jeong Taeui leisurely walked among them.

At that moment.

Where was Xinlu? He couldn't see him anywhere. In this dimly lit place, if he intentionally searched and directed his gaze toward the veiled Muslim women, it would make them uncomfortable.

“.....Ah....”

Jeong Taeui tilted his head. His steps slowed down bit by bit.

However, his steps gradually slowed until he stopped completely. Jeong Taeui didn't know why he had stopped. He just knew he was tilting his head in amazement and frowning.

It seemed like he was troubled by something at that moment.

Jeong Taeui glanced around. The road he had been observing for a while still looked the same. People from all directions were crowding in, walking back and forth, haggling, or browsing.

“....?”

He didn't know what was strange here, but he felt like something was grabbing his shoulder.

Jeong Taeui curiously looked around and then frowned, scratching his head.

"I didn't think schizophrenia could worsen to this extent. It shouldn't be like this."

Jeong Taeui muttered to himself, groaning, and turned around once more, seeing nothing. There were many people behind him, just as there were in front of him. He tilted his head again and shrugged.

"Let's find Xinlu quickly and get back to the homestay."

Jeong Taeui muttered as he walked, "Even if I die, I can't walk back to the homestay from here." Then, his shoulder brushed against someone walking by. The man muttered something in an incomprehensible language – either an apology or something rude or something similar – and stepped on Jeong Taeui's shoelace, causing it to come undone.

Jeong Taeui sighed and stepped out of the crowd, squatting down to tie his shoelace again. He tucked the ends of the laces into his shoes to keep them from coming undone again.

After retying both shoes, Jeong Taeui looked up while brushing the dust off his shoes and noticed a stall a little distance away. It was a stall that people walked past without stopping, selling children's toys or something similar. It sold trivial items like toy guns and mystery gift boxes.

Jeong Taeui raised an eyebrow and even smiled slightly.

"I miss you, hyung."

A long time ago, his house had a robot—a very simple mechanical toy robot—that was dented and had chipped paint. But he never expected to see something similar on a remote island in Africa.

Jeong Taeui stood up and walked towards it. Just as he was about to pick up the tin robot among the old toys that he wouldn't take even if they were given away for free, a man standing next to him fiddling with a hand-sized box signaled to the vendor, indicating he wanted to buy it.

Jeong Taeui glanced at the box the man was holding. He didn't know what it was, but it looked like a mystery box full of surprises. When the vendor started fiddling with something in the box as if to show him, the man suddenly grabbed it, the lid of the box opened, but nothing popped out. The box was empty.

Jeong Taeui thought that was unusual for a moment. When the man opened the box to see if there was a trigger inside, there was a sound similar to a wrench hitting the floor.

His brother liked things like that. If someone brought something like that for him, he would open it up and play with it all day.

Ever since they were young, he had always been that way. While Jeong Taeui played with the robot normally, Jeong Jaeui would take apart any toy he found a bit unusual. Then he would neatly put them back together, so he wouldn't get scolded for breaking new toys.

Jeong Taeui glanced at the person playing with the toy standing half a step away from him. To his surprise, the person he had only seen from behind was a woman. She was wrapped in a head-to-toe veil, including a face cover.

The woman seemed unable to speak and gestured to the vendor to see how much the toy cost. The vendor responded, and the woman held up three fingers. Then she took money out of her chest pocket and handed it to the vendor. The vendor smiled and said, "Thank you, thank you!" in broken English. Watching the vendor's beaming smile, Jeong Taeui thought - *'That's a rip-off.'*

It wasn't that she couldn't speak; it seemed she simply didn't understand what the vendor was saying. As she left the stall, she replied to the vendor in a low voice, "You're welcome," and then blended into the crowd ahead.

Jeong Taeui bent down to examine the tin robot behind the woman: *'This one's rusty, but the parts still work fine. But there's something odd.'* - he thought idly, and then, in a moment, he froze.

"...uh.... uh?"

Jeong Taeui looked up. Everywhere, there were people. He quickly put the robot down and stood on tiptoe, scanning the area.

He could see the back of a gray chador* cloak dozens of steps away.

Without thinking, he rushed forward.

*(*Chador is a full-body-length semicircle of fabric that is open down the front. The garment is pulled over the head, and is held closed at the front by the wearer)*

Vol 5 - Chapter 26: Jeong Jeau - Jeong Taeui

The voice was very deep, and so soft that the merchant might not have heard it, just like a faint whisper. Perhaps no one standing as close to the person as Jeong Taeui could hear that voice. A soft, gentle voice.

That sound had deeply imprinted in his subconscious.

Jeong Taeui recognized the voice, knowing that under any circumstances, that person would never raise their voice or get agitated but would always remain calm.

He recognized the quiet and gentle footsteps, moving without hesitation.

He also recognized the straight back, always facing forward and never turning unless someone called.

Jeong Taeui ran after the man in the gray chador, pushing through the bustling crowd and those blocking his way. He worried that if his view was obstructed, he might lose track of the person, making his mind tense.

"Wait..."

Jeong Taeui frantically weaved through people, occasionally bumping into or stepping on someone, but he had no time to apologize or care, he just kept rushing forward, leaving behind muttered curses.

The man in the gray chador seemed to have finished his shopping and walked out of the square, turning into a quiet street. Jeong Taeui was held back by the crowd.

In the midst of the crowd, he thought he heard Xinlu's voice calling out among the noise - "Taeil-hyung?" But his steps did not stop.

"Wait, wait, move...—move!"

Jeong Taeui shouted as he ran, trying to push through those in his way, as the man in the gray chador disappeared into an alley, almost out of sight. Jeong Taeui clicked his tongue, turned, and ran through the square in the opposite direction. This way was still crowded, but much calmer.

He didn't think he was wrong. He hadn't misheard. That voice, that back, and those footsteps.

Jeong Taeui ran in the direction the man had disappeared, occasionally sensing Xinlu's figure appearing behind him, calling his name. But he was quickly swallowed by the crowd.

Finally escaping the square, leaving the throng behind him, the only sound in the quiet alley under the bright moonlight was Jeong Taeui's hurried footsteps.

Standing in the alley where the man had turned, he couldn't see the man's figure. Jeong Taeui hesitated for a moment, then started to run forward recklessly.

His ankle throbbed with pain, understandably. Jeong Taeui thought it would get better, but he guessed this incident would send him to the hospital again.

Maybe this was a phase in his life where his ankle would constantly be in pain. Jeong Taeui sighed but didn't stop running.

The branching alleys grew like a maze. Jeong Taeui dashed forward, glancing down each alley as he passed.

Where should he turn now? He had no idea which path was correct or which alley the man had taken.

"Damn... we're not playing hide-and-seek here,..."

Jeong Taeui muttered through gritted teeth and suddenly stopped. It seemed he had caught a glimpse of a fluttering piece of clothing at the end of an alley he had just passed, but when he stopped and turned to look, the figure had vanished.

"...——."

Jeong Taeui didn't think much and immediately ran in that direction. The alley was just wide enough for one or two people to pass through, and he followed the faint, unclear traces of the other person.

Please. Please be here. Or at least not too far. No, I just want to see your back.

"Damn it, you're usually not this fast, why are you walking so quickly today... Is it someone else, is it someone else?"

Jeong Taeui spoke anxiously, wondering if that figure could belong to someone else. But a voice whispered in his heart that it couldn't be anyone else.

Jeong Taeui turned into that alley, the sound of his footsteps echoing in the quiet space. He found him.

Not far away, the man in the gray chador was standing there. It was as if he had known from the beginning that Jeong Taeui was following him, and was waiting for him. Perhaps he also wanted to ask why he was being chased.

But it was a step too late for Jeong Taeui to notice the shadow lurking at the corner of the alley. By the time he realized, it was too late, and a heavy fist punched hard into his stomach.

"...——!!!"

Jeong Taeui couldn't even muster a scream.

He glimpsed the shadow that had punched him in the stomach - it was a bearded Arab man with fierce eyes. The man muttered something, but Jeong Taeui didn't understand who he was talking to.

Isn't this the wrong order? Shouldn't he have asked who I am before hitting me...? Before he could say anything, Jeong Taeui lost consciousness.

In his fading awareness, he saw the man in the gray chador stepping back a few steps. His gaze met the eyes that were partially hidden by the headscarf. Those eyes seemed to widen in surprise when they saw him.

Jeong Taeui seemed to hear the man calling his name. And that was the last thing he heard before blacking out.

It was a very long and sad dream.

He stood still, dazed. There was nothing around him. A thick fog enveloped everything, so dense that he couldn't even see his own feet. All he could perceive was himself.

He didn't know how long he had been like this, perhaps only a fleeting moment, or it could have felt like a lifetime.

Standing motionless alone like an inanimate doll, it took a while before he sensed the presence of someone who had once been by his side. Someone who had appeared so naturally and had been there for so long that he couldn't remember or perceive when that person had arrived.

He looked around. Empty. The person had disappeared before he could even notice.

Who was that person? Where did he go? Since when had he been walking alone like this?

He wondered.

When he recalled that he had never been alone like this, a sudden feeling of loneliness washed over him.

One doesn't immediately feel the sense of loss upon losing something. It is only when one feels that emptiness that they realize the difference between having it and losing it, and what that loss truly means.

He thought he would find that person.

He couldn't remember who it was, but he wanted to find the person who had been by his side then.

So, after considering, he remembered another fact: he had a clue to find that person.

He looked down at his hand. A red thread, a red thread he hadn't noticed before, was tied around his wrist. The thread extended far away, its end invisible.

If he followed it, he might find the other end.

He stepped out.

It was easy to follow the thread forward. It twisted but still led him to where he needed to go.

It didn't take long before he finally saw a figure at the other end.

His heart pounded. His steps quickened, and he finally reached the place where the person stood.

But his steps halted abruptly.

His thread had been cut, falling at his feet. Hadn't it been whole from the beginning? But now it was severed.

He thought he would have to tie it again and continue forward. But before he could reach it, the person picked up the end of the thread and wrapped it around their finger.

He stopped. The person standing there took a step back, seemingly smiling. But that smile looked so sad. Damn. His heart ached.

Step by step, he walked forward without hesitation.

Would his thread be tied to someone else's hand now? Is that why he couldn't find him? He hadn't realized that they had been together so long that he couldn't even remember.

He had never thought of untying that thread and binding him. The person who would walk with him from now on would be the one always by his side. But the sense of loss remained. It was so sad. I miss you.

He slowly opened his eyes. He blinked a few times and then closed his eyes again before fully waking up.

What a strange dream, Jeong Taeui thought.

His mind still seemed to be stuck in that dream. He was still standing in the middle of an empty space, with nothing around him. And it seemed like there was still someone standing beyond the misty veil. Someone he couldn't reach even if he extended his hand.

But after just a few blinks, the dream quickly faded from his mind. Jeong Taeui remembered dreaming about something, but couldn't recall exactly what it was. The only thing that lingered was a vague sense of longing and regret.

These feelings floated in his mind even as he woke up.

Suddenly, perhaps it had something to do with that dream. But now, even those feelings had faded into his memories – so he couldn't grasp them. Then he remembered what he had heard the day before.

"You'll be fine."

It was a gentle voice. And when he said that, he smiled. It wasn't exactly a bright, cheerful smile. Just a sincere and calm smile, as if out of habit.

"That's why... Ah. When exactly... I can't remember."

Jeong Taeui frowned. He recalled a time when he was sick, when he was very young. It was almost the only memory Jeong Taeui had of being sick as a child.

Perhaps one day, when he wasn't even as tall as Jeong Jaeui's thigh, he had a fever and was bedridden. Although, it probably wasn't the first time he had been sick. His mother had been very sad and worried, but it seemed she wasn't overly troubled by it. Because him falling ill was a frequent occurrence.

When Jeong Taeui was lying flat on the bed with a fever, Jeong Jaeui, who was also still young at the time, came and sat beside him.

But their mother stopped him and said - "Your brother is sick, so you can't be near him right now." worried that he would catch the illness from eating and sleeping together. According to her, whenever Jeong Taeui got sick, Jeong Jaeui would soon fall ill as well.

"Even if we're separated, we'll still get sick. I want to be with Taeui-il. Because he'll feel lonely if he's alone."

Many years later, his mother told him those things. It was an old story recounted gently, as she smiled and said both of them were always like that when they were little.

At that time, their father had a family meeting on his side of the family, so he had to go. For some reason, he rarely visited his family, and it seemed like there had been some issues. He said he would stay there for two or three days and would take Jeong Jaeui with him so their mother could take care of Jeong Taeui at home. They said it was best to keep the two boys apart because they were so prone to catching illnesses from each other.

Jeong Taeui shook his head vigorously in refusal, Jeong Jaeui had always been by Jeong Taeui's side when he was sick, but their father still took his brother away. Only he and his mother remained at home. But that night, their father returned home at midnight. His arms still holding Jeong Jaeui, who was now burning with a high fever.

Finally, the two of them were tucked under blankets lying next to each other in a room. "I guess these kids are always sick together like this." - His mother whispered, both worried and astonished. But in reality, Jeong Taeui seemed to have very few memories of that time.

The only thing he remembered was that Jeong Jaeui lay beside him. At that time, his whole body was burning and he couldn't move, but his vision was strangely clear.

After a long period of painful unconsciousness, there were moments when the fever subsided and when he opened his eyes, he saw his brother lying next to him, looking at him intently. Jeong Jaeui blinked his hazy eyes with a hint of excitement when he saw his brother. When their eyes met, he let out a weak and heavy breath.

"Are you okay? Does it hurt?"

Jeong Taeui slowly sat up, the weather was cold but he was drenched in sweat. He spoke while trembling and crawled back under the blanket.

"It doesn't hurt. But it's so cold, are you sick too?"

As he whispered, with only his face peeking out from under the blanket, Jeong Jaeui was silent for a moment. His small chest heaved like a weak little bird. The breath from his tired, flushed face was very hot. Jeong Jaeui spoke wearily.

"As long as you're okay, that's all that matters. I'll be fine too."

After saying that, Jeong Jaeui slowly closed his eyes. Suddenly, seeing his brother close his eyes as if about to lose consciousness, Jeong Taeui remembered that he reached his hand out from under the cold blanket and placed it on his brother's forehead.

"...Thinking back, it does seem a bit unfair."

Jeong Taeui muttered to himself.

He was lost in those old memories. And then he remembered. When they were young, their mother said that Jeong Jaeui was always by his side whenever he was sick. It was rare for Jeong Jaeui to get sick first and for Jeong Taeui to fall ill afterward. But whenever Jeong Taeui got sick, Jeong Jaeui would definitely get sick too, even if they were far apart. Their mother used to smile and say - "You two are a very strange pair of twins, aren't you?"

Thinking about it now, it was indeed strange. And Jeong Jaeui must have felt very unfair that whenever he got sick, he had to endure it alone. But whenever his younger brother got sick, he would fall ill as well. It wouldn't be surprising if he felt it was unfair.

Jeong Taeui sighed and rubbed his eyes, the sleepiness not yet completely gone. He yawned, his eyes welling up with tears.

Wait, why is there no sunlight? Usually, whenever he opened his eyes, the sunlight streaming through the window next to him would fill the room, making his eyes sting. Is it cloudy today?

"Ugh..." Jeong Taeui groaned as he opened his eyes wide. He had felt something unusual just now, but he had brushed it off because he was still preoccupied with other thoughts in a state of grogginess...

"Where am I? This place..."

Jeong Taeui mumbled to himself in a daze.

The ceiling was too high, as if the ceiling of the floor above had been removed, revealing an oddly lofty roof.

Ugh... Jeong Taeui groaned emptily, and then he sat up abruptly, looking around with sleepy, bewildered eyes.

This was a strange room. Inside this spacious room, which seemed even larger because of the excessively high ceiling, Jeong Taeui found himself sitting on a bed with the canopy half hanging down and half rolled up.

"...."

Vol 5 - Chapter 27: You too. Happy Birthday, Taeui

Jeong Taeui scratched his head, blinked as he looked around the room, then stepped out of bed. The smooth wooden floor felt pleasant against the soles of his feet. After a few steps, he felt a soft carpet underfoot.

In reality, the room wasn't as spacious as he had initially thought. It contained only a large bed and a few potted plants placed haphazardly beside it. The space was just enough to move around comfortably. Jeong Taeui slowly scanned the room and noticed an open door, so he stepped outside.

Beyond the door was an open space.

No, he wasn't sure if it could be called "outside."

He was standing in the middle of a square building with an open central courtyard, four hallways forming a square with a vacant middle area. Each hallway had a grand door in the center, and a polished stone floor led straight from the bedroom to the outside.

Jeong Taeui stepped out, squinting against the bright sunlight. The stone floor beneath his feet was warmed to a comfortable temperature by the sun.

In the middle of the enclosed courtyard (about the size of three or four classrooms) was a small square stone pool, large enough to fit a few dozen people. The water was crystal clear.

"Am I in some sort of cathedral?"

Jeong Taeui sighed and muttered to himself.

Step by step, he moved toward the pool, feeling as if he had entered a quiet mosque.

There was a man sitting by the pool, intently examining a small box in his hands. He seemed lost in his own thoughts as he fiddled with the mysterious box.

Jeong Taeui immediately walked toward the man. Perhaps the man knew Jeong Taeui was approaching, but he didn't look up, remaining engrossed in his thoughts and the small box. Finally, Jeong Taeui stopped a few steps away and quietly looked down at him.

"Anyway, if there was a spring in that secret box, it would have been there already. But there seems to be something a bit unusual about it."

Jeong Taeui suddenly spoke, and the man mumbled - "Yes, it's rather unusual." - without lifting his gaze from the box.

"There are 12 springs. The wooden plate at the end acts like a key. When you lift it, it compresses and then pops out instantly, like a ball. It's a really interesting idea."

He spoke calmly, closed the box, and handed it to Jeong Taeui, saying - "Do you want to take a look?"

Jeong Taeui smiled, stayed silent for a moment, then accepted the box. He then sat down beside Jeong Jaeui. He knew that even if he opened the box and examined it, he wouldn't understand its inner workings. No, if it were a simple toy like this, he might be able to grasp it, but in most cases, he never fully understood the items his brother showed him.

Jeong Taeui fiddled with the box and looked at Jeong Jaeui.

"By the way, where are we, hyung?"

"Let's see. I'm not really sure."

"...Do you at least know this is Tanzania?"

Jeong Taeui grumbled about why he had to be the one to inform his brother of such things, but then he reconsidered, realizing it might actually be possible. Then, with a hint of surprise, his brother paused and said - "This is Africa... I'm not really sure."

Jeong Taeui licked his lips and scratched his head. His brother blinked a few times, lost in thought, and muttered indifferently.

"Islamic culture is common in the Southern Hemisphere... Zanzibar? ———No, Seringe."

"That's right. Seringe."

His brother didn't even seem to notice such a place existed until asked. But Jeong Taeui wasn't surprised that he could pinpoint the name of the island after just a few seconds of thinking.

Jeong Taeui smiled and spoke to the man, who seemed so indifferent that he didn't even know where he was.

"I couldn't contact you because you were stuck in a place like this. But I thought you might reach out to me on our birthday."

"Ah... I tried to find a way to contact you, but I had already discarded everything. Whenever I thought of how to reach you, another thought would pop up. So, I ended up forgetting."

Jeong Jaeui spoke with an expression not much different from usual. But Jeong Taeui smiled, feeling a vague sense of regret for his brother's unchanging demeanor.

"Last night, I dreamed about you, so I thought I should try to contact you somehow, but it seems everything worked out quite easily."

"...Ah... I see. So that's why we met."

Jeong Taeui smiled thoughtfully.

Everything was just the same. Nothing could change in just a few months, and he was the same too. Jeong Jaeui was still Jeong Jaeui, exactly as he had been when he disappeared.

He suddenly felt really good.

Under the deep blue sky, in this quiet, desolate place, he met the person he wanted to see.

Jeong Taeui sighed contentedly and lay down, spreading his arms wide, looking up at the face looking down at him, and said - "A bit late, but happy birthday, hyung."

He gave a gentle smile. A gentle smile appeared on his brother's calm face. Without a doubt, he was Jeong Jaeui, Jeong Taeui's brother. The one he hadn't seen for many months.

Jeong Jaeui nodded and responded - "You too. Happy birthday, Taeui."

[END VOL 5.]

Hidden track - Vol 5: Exception (1)

ONE ACT

No one was in the room he was searching.

Gable looked around the empty room for a moment before returning to the hallway. If there was no one on the second floor, then they must be in the room to the left of this one. This was the room of the young man who had accompanied him.

As he approached, he could hear sounds coming from behind the door. It sounded like talking or arguing, but he couldn't make out the words because of the heavy door separating them. But there was definitely more than one person in that room.

Gable didn't hesitate to knock on the door. After all, the man Gable was looking for would have sensed his presence the moment he stepped onto the first step of the staircase leading to the second floor.

"Excuse me for a moment."

Gable knocked on the door and spoke briefly, waiting a second or two before turning the handle. Even though there was no response, he didn't care much. From the start, the person inside was not someone who would respond to such unnecessary questions.

The door opened. Gable took a step inside and then stopped. As he had thought, there were two people in the room. It was indeed with a young man. Up to that point, everything was as he had predicted, but there was one situation he had not anticipated.

"..."

No one spoke. Gable, the man, and the young man all remained silent. The young man didn't even move. He had his back to Gable, frozen in place.

The timing wasn't right.

Gable felt a bit sorry for the young man, but not for the man.

The young man had his face buried between the legs of the man sitting on the bed. Judging by the pale hands gripping and pressing down on the young man's head — Gable knew well how strong and firm those beautiful, smooth hands were — they seemed to be holding the struggling young man down.

The moment he entered, the poor young man seemed to freeze when he sensed Gable's presence, with the man's penis still in his mouth.

Gable watched the scene silently. The man sitting across from Gable pressed down on the young man's head with one hand and spoke.

"Is it urgent?"

"Not really. I'll wait downstairs. Come down when you're finished."

The man waved his hand slightly in acknowledgment. Gable turned away from the man, quietly closed the door, and left. Just like when he went up, he descended the stairs lightly. There was no rush. It was just rumored that the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States would soon be replaced. It would be a while before it was announced, and it wasn't urgent news right now.

Sitting on a bench in the hallway downstairs, Gable picked up a newspaper from the stack on the table. He opened the paper and clicked his tongue.

The man had already undressed. His usually squinted eyes were more heated than usual. So, it was unlikely that this would end with just a few words. After ejaculating once or twice in the young man's mouth, he was likely to pin him down and continue. Gable was about to sigh deeply when the landlady walked by, tilting her head and asking if there was anything troubling him.

Gable shook his head.

"No, just thinking I might have to clean up another dead body today."

"Oh my God. No way. Please don't do anything that would bring the police here."

The landlady probably thought he was joking. She laughed and then disappeared into one of the rooms.

But Gable wasn't entirely joking.

He had faced such situations quite a few times. Before working outside, he had worked with James under Kyle at the T&R headquarters. To be precise, James managed the company on behalf of their lazy boss, while Gable handled matters related to the boss's personal issues.

The problems Kyle faced couldn't even be counted on both hands, but the biggest problem he had to deal with came from his own family. Among them, his younger brother was the most significant issue. His biological brother.

That younger brother—the man who was on the second floor—had been a problem even before he reached adulthood.

When he was three or four years old, Kyle once wondered, "I wonder if I named my brother incorrectly. I think it would have been better to name him Damian*."

*(*Damian: Gentle, friendly, restraint/ or in the Bible: The tamer - likes to control things that belong to him.)*

Kyle was already an adult at that time and had a considerable age gap with his younger brother. People said that although the boy was a promising child with great potential, his

beautiful hair might need to be shaved off to see if there was a Satan demon stuck somewhere in his head.

Strangers took it as a joke, but Gable knew it was the truth. Of course, most people who knew about the younger brother understood what kind of person he was.

Initially, the one who handled most of the messes caused by the younger brother was James. Then, a few years ago, when James had to undergo psychological counseling and sought every possible way to resign due to the enormous workload, Gable took on part of James' responsibilities. And dealing with Kyle's younger brother was one of those tasks.

There are things he still remembers very clearly.

He had once had to dispose of a dead body.

Gable quietly carried the body away, never imagining he would have to do something like that in his lifetime. Gable looked at the young man, wondering whether he had been defending himself or overreacting when he caused this mess. The young man just stood there motionless, staring down at the blood on his hands.

At that time, he wasn't old enough to be considered an adult and was still a young man. He wasn't even of legal age yet, and Gable thought this probably wasn't the first or only murder he had committed. Gable asked bluntly.

"Shocked, aren't you?"

When he asked, Gable remembered the first time he killed a man.

Of course, he hadn't killed because he wanted to. When he was young, he had worked for the Department of Defense for a short period and had no choice but to kill someone in self-defense during an encounter. However, the memory of the hot blood rising at that moment was something he would probably never forget until the day he died. Maybe the person would have certainly killed Gable if he hadn't killed them, and even though the cause of all that trouble was the opponent, he didn't have to feel guilty or regretful or suffer from a guilty conscience because of it. And that was the first time he killed someone.

Looking at the horrifyingly bloody corpse in front of him, he didn't think to say anything kind to the young man. But seeing him standing there, staring at his bloodstained hands, Gable spoke up unconsciously. *"You're shocked, aren't you?"* The smell of blood, the feeling of the warm blood that he had only imagined before was now vividly real before his eyes with the motionless corpse. Was he shocked?

But shortly after, Gable received a reply he had vaguely expected.

"Hmm?"

Gable made eye contact with the man looking at him and immediately realized he had asked a pointless question.

"Amazing. Do you have a wet towel? I should have wiped it before the blood dried. Once it dries, it's hard to clean."

Gable quietly pointed to a nearby bathroom. Then he continued to clean up the body.

This wasn't his first time. Gable, James, and the others hadn't known that he was already quite familiar with killing. His voice carried no guilt. *'Tsk, maybe I should wear gloves next time'* he muttered.

Yes. He was that kind of person. A person without the emotions a human should have.

"....."

These wandering thoughts didn't stop him from thoroughly reading the evening news in the paper while still deep in thought. Today, the world was a mess.

Gable glanced up at the second floor. There were no more sounds coming from above.

He stood up, went to the kitchen, grabbed a fruit from the basket, and wiped it on his pants. Gable took a bite, eating as he looked out at the small square outside the window, then returned to the hall. On his way back, he received a telegram. Gable slowly made his way to the hall, glancing through it to see if there was anything he could respond to immediately. Then he saw him coming down from the second floor, now sitting on the sofa.

He was flipping through the newspaper on the table, wearing only pants, looking slightly disheveled compared to his usual self, as if proudly showing off what he had just done. The clear bite marks on his arm looked like they had been clenched by someone's hands.

Gable turned and walked towards the second floor when he saw the man who didn't even glance at him, just flipping through the newspaper, aware of his presence.

It was time to dispose of the corpse.

In fact, he had come down faster than Gable had expected. Gable thought it would take longer for him to finish, surprisingly. Has he run out of stamina over the years? Or had his sexual tendencies changed?

Previously, he didn't care if his partner's body was torn apart or unconscious, he would disregard it and quickly satisfy his desires before nonchalantly leaving.

That's usually how it went.

A few years ago, shortly after Gable took over handling matters related to him, the man finally reached adulthood, no longer a child and capable of handling his own messes without relying on others. At that time, Gable had to leave Germany for overseas assignments. Their connection ended, but until then, Gable frequently had to clean up the dead bodies left behind by him.

Of course, not all of them were dead bodies.

It was like this.

When he was rolling around with another woman or man on the bed.

Depending on the situation, but not limited by time or circumstance, it would take hours before he left the bed. After he finished, he would go straight to the bathroom, and Gable would take care of the poor victims while he was showering.

Generally, his main job was to quickly take the unconscious person to the hospital, usually with blood-soaked legs or a face covered in tears, mucus, or other bodily fluids. If the victim was a man, there were situations where they had to go to the hospital due to severe internal injuries or rectal prolapse; If it is a woman, she will be hospitalized for uterine prolapse, vaginal tearing...

<When I edited this part, I fainted 7749 times 🦴>

Even Gable had to frown at the sight of the man's organ when he accidentally saw it a few times. There were even people who blindly wanted to follow him. But when he undressed, they would pale, screaming and crying to go back.

After waking up in the hospital, some of them said they would sue. And almost all of them gave the same reason.

No matter if they said no, cried, begged, or resisted in anger, the man would ignore their pleas and proceed. Blood from their torn bodies would flow down their thighs, soaking the sheets, but he wouldn't care until he was satisfied. After finishing, he would casually head to the bathroom alone.

Gable knew all this because he was the one who took them to the hospital after they passed out.

Seeing them faint with bloodied bodies, yes. Even if there were no dead bodies but just unconscious people, Gable sometimes felt like fainting too.

Gable sighed and walked up to the second floor. Although he hadn't seen him in years, it seemed he hadn't changed.

But the young man he had brought along—who might now be a bloodied corpse on the second floor—was someone Kyle had previously mentioned to Gable.

"Maybe he'll be with Ilay. He's a good guy and Jeong Jaewi's younger brother. Help him out and take care of him."

However, before he could help or take care of him, the young man had already died. On the very first day they arrived here.

Maybe he wasn't actually dead. Gable clicked his tongue. The young man had left a good impression on him, and Gable also had a good feeling about him. After all, where had he gotten caught by that inhuman man? Gable climbed the stairs to the second floor, hoping the island's medical facilities could handle it and it wouldn't be serious enough to require going

offshore to a major hospital on the mainland. However, after climbing a few steps, he heard a voice behind him.

"Where are you going, Gable?"

Gable turned to the voice calling him. He was still holding the newspaper and spoke in a monotonous tone.

Gable raised an eyebrow.

"Well... I'm going to clean up."

When Gable replied that he was going to take care of the body upstairs, he lowered his voice.

"Don't go."

Gable stared at the man. He was still flipping through the newspaper, his face expressionless as if nothing had happened.

Gable descended the stairs again and sat across from him.

This situation. It seemed he had made a foolish mistake. Previously, he would have quickly realized this atmosphere.

His mood was very bad. Although he was still flipping through the newspaper indifferently, his voice cold and his hand movements calm, Gable could sense his unusual mood. In this case, if he made even the slightest mistake, he might see a 'real corpse.'

Gable looked at him with a puzzled expression. He couldn't understand why his mood had dropped so suddenly.

But thinking back to when he was on the second floor, his mood had been off ever since Gable caught that unexpected scene. Gable still remembered his cold voice when he asked him, *'Is it urgent?'*

From what Gable could infer, there had probably been an argument with the young man.

But another question arose.

Based on Gable's understanding of this man, he wasn't someone who would do that with someone he didn't like. If he truly disliked someone, that person would likely be a corpse by now. No, for those he didn't like, there was no humanity in his treatment from the start.

That man...

When he met him at the airport and saw the young man for the first time, although he didn't show it, Gable had been very surprised when the young man called him by that name. And he responded with a calm face. Until now, at least to Gable, he had never seen anyone call this man by his name other than his family.

Gable had been very curious about how this man had such a friend and even more surprised to know he still kept him as a friend despite being Jeong Jaeui's younger brother. (Even though he had never heard anything like this from Kyle).

And now. This situation also completely surprised him.

Could it be that because he was Jeong Jaeui's younger brother, he cared about him like this? Of course not, because this man was not the type to care about anyone for such reasons.

"Gable."

Suddenly, he spoke, still not taking his eyes off the newspaper. Gable remained silent, waiting for his next words. He glanced at Gable. His eyes were as cold as ice.

"Never enter without my permission when I'm with him."

"And forget what you saw earlier."

"...I understand."

These words also astonished him. Perhaps it was because this man had changed over the years without Gable knowing.

"Alright. What's the matter? Nothing to discuss?"

"Ah. The boss contacted me. It seems the Arab ambassador to the US will soon be changed. UNHRDO might also receive the news soon."

"Who?"

"The Hazard lineage probably has the most power, so it could be one of the two princes."

"Then Musta..."

He was talking while folding the newspaper, but then he suddenly fell silent. Gable tilted his head slightly, waiting for his train of thought to conclude. It seemed to be something related to work.

Gable waited patiently. And the words that followed left him going from one surprise to another shock.

"This matter might require a longer discussion. Let's continue in your room... but before that."

Gable stood up, following the man who had just put down the newspaper and risen from the sofa. He was about to walk away but suddenly stopped, frowning in silence after speaking. Gable raised an eyebrow, pretending to be unaware.

"...The owner of this place asked her to prepare food for him first. Because he said he was very hungry."

Gable stood in stunned silence at his unexpected words. After a moment of quiet, Gable replied: "I understand." Then he instructed him to go to his room first while he headed to the kitchen to convey the message to the landlady. He had been here quite a while, and the landlady was quite friendly with Gable. She responded with a radiant smile, "Alright," and went upstairs.

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Gable tilted his head and took a few cans of beer from the refrigerator before returning to his room.

Indeed, he had witnessed all kinds of things in his short life.

The work that needed to be discussed was quickly finished in less than 5 minutes.

Honestly, there wasn't anything particularly special. Gable and he talked about various events happening around the world, the plans Kyle had made, and the developments they could foresee.

Discussing work with this man always ended succinctly.

If the matter didn't require any assessment or decision, he usually just listened and reviewed the information Gable provided. When a decision needed to be made, he didn't ponder too long but simply checked a few things and made a decision immediately.

In this regard, Kyle and he were alike. At least regarding work matters, Gable had never felt uncomfortable talking to them.

"...That's all the work to discuss today."

"Mm."

When Gable finished speaking, he gave a short reply.

Gable sat still for a while, waiting for him to stand up and leave the room since all the work had been discussed. But the man sitting on the long couch, one knee bent on the seat, seemed still lost in his own thoughts. *tok*, *tok*, his fingers tapping on his knee showed no sign of stopping his train of thought.

He had been like that for a while... Clearly, he was still listening to what Gable had to say. Occasionally, he would ask questions and also answer Gable's questions. If there was any part that seemed doubtful, he would delve into it and seek more details. So, it wasn't that he was just nodding along without actually listening.

But clearly, his responses to Gable were very dry. It was like one side of his brain was listening to Gable, while the other was preoccupied with other thoughts.

Gable couldn't know what he was thinking, but he could somewhat guess the reason for the man's discomfort.

Gable sat down in front of him, opened a can of beer that he had taken from the kitchen earlier. Then, he drank the beer while flipping through the book he had been reading the night

before. He didn't know what the man was preoccupied with, but if he was worrying about something, it would be better for him to think it over in his own room, wouldn't it? And Gable didn't want to talk to someone in such a bad mood.

The man pondered deeply but was not unfocused. He grabbed a can of beer, popped it open, and drank it down like it was water.

"Sultaisra*. He would like it."

Suddenly, he muttered. Gable glanced up from his book to look at him. The man seemed to be talking to himself and didn't need a response from Gable. He went back to his book again.

Would he go back to his room after finishing the beer?

But the man didn't return immediately. He continued drinking more cans of beer in silence. He kept gulping them down one after another like water, so the number of beers Gable brought quickly dwindled to empty cans. Gable had brought four 1000ml cans, and the man had downed the remaining three while Gable had only finished one and was still reading his book.

When he finished the last can and placed the empty one on the table, Gable had just turned to the final page of his book. He looked at the empty can and said,

"Do you want me to get some more?"

He didn't respond. Gable took the silence as a yes, so he got up and went to the kitchen. The landlady was washing dishes. She looked happy to see Gable.

"Yuri. Shall we have dinner?"

"Yeah. Later. Have they eaten?"

"If you mean the others, only Taeil has. He just finished dessert and went upstairs. He seemed very tired, even fell asleep while eating. He's probably asleep by now."

"Alright. I'll eat later then. I'll bring some beers first."

Instead of saying goodbye, Gable responded with a kiss on the cheek and returned with three or four more cans of beer.

The man was still sitting there, lost in thought, just like when Gable left. But his expression seemed even more troubled than before. Gable sighed deeply and set the beers down in front of him.

"Taeil finished dinner and went to his room. Anna said he's asleep now."

"Asleep?"

Suddenly, a deep wrinkle appeared between his eyebrows.

"Asleep? Asleep now?!"

"...Uh, I don't know. He was nodding off while eating, so he's probably asleep now."

Gable spoke calmly, even as the man glared fiercely. However, Gable pretended not to notice and took a sip of his beer.

"He cried so much, so that's why he fell asleep."

tok, tok The fingers tapping on his knee seemed to press harder. Even his voice, though gentle, was lower than usual.

Gable raised an eyebrow and silently drank his beer. Crying? He couldn't understand what the man was saying.

"Let me tell you, he doesn't actually hate it... Even if at first, he said it was uncomfortable because he felt tired and demeaned, eventually he would give in and accept it. He said there were times when he felt like he was losing his mind. So, I just did it naturally." <:DD>

Gable pressed his lips together slightly.

Because in order to live...

"So, even if he cries, it's not really crying. Right?"

"...Mm. I don't know the context, so..."

Gable really couldn't understand. Because the things this man was saying were words he never thought he would hear from him. What exactly was he trying to say? If it were someone else, he wouldn't be confused, but because it was him speaking, Gable found it incomprehensible.

"He actually doesn't really hate me... clearly."

Ilay mumbled to himself. He downed another can of beer like it was water, lost in his own thoughts.

Gable watched him for a moment before slowly asking,

"If he really hates you, is there something that's bothering you?"

When Gable asked, still not understanding the context, Ilay was silent. Suddenly, his expression turned somewhat strange.

But then he frowned in dissatisfaction, pondered for a moment, and slightly tilted his head.

"No."

Gable nodded and closed his mouth.

There was no need to say anything further. The conclusion had been reached. After answering like that, Ilay shook his head thoughtfully again. Gable counted the empty beer cans. He wasn't the type to get drunk on just a few 1000ml cans of beer.

To be honest, Gable had witnessed all the strangest things in his life in just one day.

No, realizing that Ilay was actually drunk, Gable suddenly wondered if he himself was the one dreaming from being so drunk.

Yes, that might even make more sense.

Gable was considering whether to go outside into the garden to breathe in the fresh air when Ilay stood up. It seemed like he was planning to go back to his room.

As the sun set and darkness enveloped the place, the landlady turned on the garden lights. It wasn't something everyone needed, but it was used to welcome unexpected guests in the middle of the night or anyone who wanted to take a walk in the garden.

Thanks to this, Gable, who was naturally night-blind, could comfortably walk in the garden, even at midnight, without worrying about what was underfoot. Sometimes he would even jump into the pool for a few laps if he felt like it.

But today, he wasn't in the mood for swimming. So he slowly walked under the fruit trees in the garden and took a deep breath.

Starting tomorrow, he would be busier than he was now. Of course, up until this point, he had faced many difficulties in gathering even the smallest pieces of information. Traveling from one country to another, from India to the Middle East, he had traveled thousands of miles without hesitation to gather even the smallest piece of information. So, finally, he discovered that the person he was looking for was here.

From tomorrow onwards, they would have to make a real effort to find that person.

"You won't be the one to find Jeong Jaeui, it will be his younger brother."

Kyle had said. And that was the young man. When Gable asked why, Kyle smirked and said there was no reason. But it had to be that young man. Because he was Jeong Jaeui's lucky charm.

Gable decided to trust Kyle's words. From his long experience, he knew that choosing to believe that was the wise thing to do.

While strolling through the garden in the cool night air, he suddenly looked up at the second floor. Earlier, Vivi—a shy black girl who lived in a small house less than a five-minute walk from there and helped Anna with the housework—had hesitantly asked Gable, looking extremely bashful, who the older brother in the room upstairs was. Vivi was picking fruit in the garden when their eyes met. Gable smiled gently.

Since it was the last room on the second floor, Gable thought of both the man and the young boy who had used that room together and pondered who the last user was. After some

thought, Gable mentioned the young boy's name. Vivi repeated it after him several times with a clumsy pronunciation, "Taeil, Taeil."

Gable understood the shyness on Vivi's face when she remembered the young boy. He seemed to be someone who easily garnered goodwill from those he interacted with. Gable looked up at the second floor from right beside the fence next to the mango tree that Vivi was about to pick from. Indeed, from this position, one could clearly see what was happening inside the last room on the second floor.

Gable casually glanced up at the room and tilted his head. The light was still on. Anna had said that he was fast asleep, but that didn't seem to be the case.

However, when thinking about it, he quickly tilted his head to the side. In that last room on the second floor, there was a figure faintly visible by the window. He was leaning against the window, quietly looking down at the bed. It was the same man who had been drinking beer like water in Gable's room earlier.

"..."

Gable rubbed his eyes and looked up again. He was still standing there.

Ilay wasn't the type of person who wouldn't notice someone blatantly watching him, no matter how far away that person was. But he didn't seem to care and just stared down at the bed in silence.

What was so interesting that he had to look at it with such a gentle gaze? Wasn't it just a young boy sleeping soundly?

Gable leaned against the fence, folded his arms, and prepared to observe slowly. He wanted to know how long the man would continue to do such a perplexing thing.

The man, like Gable, was also standing with his arms crossed. He leaned his head slightly against the window, staring intently at the bed as if his gaze wanted to cling to the person lying there. Then, suddenly, he slightly moved away from the window, his previously emotionless face breaking into a smile as if he had seen something. He extended his arm, seemingly touching the person on the bed, but then immediately leaned back against the window and crossed his arms again.

Gable, confident in his own persistence, felt a bit disheartened by this. The man wasn't doing anything specific, so there was no reason for him to keep watching. Gable checked his watch. It was late. Time to head back and sleep.

Gable left the fence and looked up at the second floor once more. The man was still there. Motionless. He couldn't possibly sleep in that room. Gable thought wryly. Because he wasn't the type to sleep with someone else on the same bed.

Gable sighed, hmm, and rubbed his neck. He looked down at his feet, this time falling into his own thoughts. But those thoughts didn't last long. Gable shook his head and shrugged.

There are many things in the world that human perception cannot understand, and many things that cannot be understood even on a personal level, even if human perception could grasp them.

Gable watched for a little longer, then finally sighed and decided to stop thinking about things he couldn't understand.

He walked away slowly, hands clasped behind his back, and immersed himself in thought.

He didn't understand... But what did it matter?

He never meddled in other people's business and didn't talk much. That was good for him, after all, because perhaps now he wouldn't have to deal with dead bodies anymore.

FINISHED.
